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**TWO
BIG
NOVELS**

Magazine

TIMBER HAWKS

*gun-swift novel
of the timber
toppers by*

JACK BERTIN

**FROZEN
FRONTIER**

by
**Cliff
Campbell**



DOUBLE ACTION
MAGAZINE

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Vol. I, No. 1

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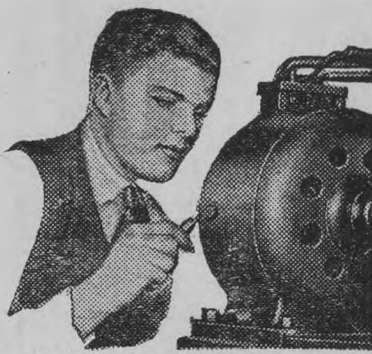


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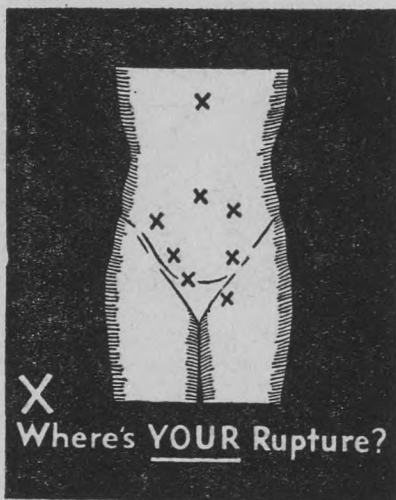
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State whether for Man—Woman—or Child—



TIMBER HAWKS

It was a grudge against the world that sent these two far north into the timber country to fight for life against man and nature

CHAPTER I

BILL, sometimes William Sadler, transcontinental traveler, was sure of two things immediately after the door of the box car screeched protestingly open. One was the fact that being very hungry affected more than a man's stomach. Secondly, the realization came to him that Kipling was right. There is neither border nor breed nor birth when two strong men stand face to face. The individual entering thru the squeaky door was evidently a strong man. A barrel chest and a pugnacious scowl proclaimed that—the belligerent thrust of a jaw covered with red beard. Young Sadler moved slowly erect in the swaying freight car, his

tawny, bare head level with the fifth bolt row—a quite respectable height.

Another passenger stirred in the box car's corner—and together the two eyed the man in the door. Young Sadler essayed a grin. He was very hungry. Also, he was in the wrong. The red bearded brakeman was justice, militant justice armed with what looked suspiciously like the half of a pick handle. In the car's other corner Skeets Donnelly rubbed his eyes totally clear of sleep and swore softly, expressively, even artistically, as only Skeets Donnelly could swear. Skeets had jumped the car at Santa Rosa, clad in night club attire, and had been frankly pleased to find the place inhabited. He was also as frankly puzzled, after appraisals had been made on



AN ACTION-PACKED NOVEL OF THE TIMBER TOPPERS

by **JACK BERTIN**

both sides. Skeets had been confident there was only one of his kind seeing America first, and that he was the one. Young Sadler and his almost clean clothes had been a shock. But the brakeman, clad tho he was in soiled overalls, was a greater. Skeets had seen many brakemen in many moods, but never one like the burly gentleman with the pick handle.

TWO more of yuh, huh? Think this Cascade run is put on to tote bums around to look at the scenery?"

No answer.

"Well — stiffs — the scenery is all yours—"

"Say," said Skeets. "Look here. We ain't stiffs. Look us over, Horatio—look us

over. Gentlemen, we are—doing this on a bet." His imagination caught up with the idea. "Ten thousand dollar bet, we made, in Chicago, that we'd reach Alaska without spending a cent—"

"Yeah?" asked the brakeman, with exaggerated surprise. "Go all the way to Alaska without spendin' a cent?" He scowled suddenly. "Can that line, String Bean—an' fork up! Ridin' in this car costs dues. Make it snappy!"

Skeets looked at Bill.

"Fork up, Alaska!" he grinned.

Young Sadler felt deep regret, and showed it.

"Sorry, mister—but I haven't any money. What's the odds?" he shrugged a respectable pair of shoulders. "Might as

well let us ride. We're doing no harm—"

"No—o?" The red bearded brakeman had dramatic ways. And disturbing ones. He walked over to Sadler. "Listen, you big bum—one more crack out of you—both of you—an' I'll bust youse all up! Get it? Now come across! I know you stiffs—"

Skeets edged sideways, feeling all of a sudden, tight and wary. Sadler was still smiling—but Skeets reached the decision that it was the strangest smile he had ever seen. There was a wicked relish in it now—a queer sort of enjoyment.

"Mister—I'm sorry—"

The brakeman pushed out angrily with a huge, outspread hand, meant to lodge forcibly on the smiling face. The face moved—reappeared to one side.

"Mister—better forget it—"

The big brakeman recovered from his awkward thrust, realized, and moved to the pull of his instincts—

"You damned—"

The vicious cut of the pick handle missed its object. Skeets did not clearly see. Sadler seemed to pivot at the waist, a quick, reversing twist of his whole torso. The sodden, unmistakable smash of flesh meeting flesh sounded—a quick one-two audible above the wheel and rail clickings—the confused general rattle of the freight. The brakeman fairly flopped backward, and went down to the hard wooden flooring, an inert mass.

Skeets stared.

"Suffering Sicilians!" he muttered at last—and looked at William Sadler. "What's your name—Dempsey?"

"Wish it was!" grunted the other, balancing himself. "I could have bought him off, then—and saved myself a knuckle. Here, pull on that, Skeets."

Skeets pulled, choking back his wonder.

"What we going to do with him now?"

"Leave him here, I guess. We'll have to duck. The law's behind him—and we're

not breaking any laws. My grudge is against the world—not Uncle Sam."

Skeets looked at Sadler again, and shrugged.

"It must be *some* grudge, if it comes out like that!" he grinned, but said nothing further. The other's tone had gone momentarily serious, and Skeets Donnelly never pried into serious things.

"How're we going to leave this Pull-man?" he queried, as the two stood in the doorway, watching the scenery of Upper California slide past. Mountains tumbled up in colossal grandeur to the east of the roadbed—slope upon slope—tree clad, vast—a magnificent panorama of peaks and splints and long, dark valleys that slowly opened up, and closed as the train moved along. William Sadler gazed frowningly at the view.

"Up in the Cascades, aren't we?"

Skeets shrugged.

"I wouldn't bet on it. What I know about this country is something to be silent about. They're mountains, and they're north of Santa Rosa—"

"They're the Cascades, all right. The brakeman said so. Last place in the world I want to get off—"

"Why?" asked Skeets, then frowned at himself. "Mountains don't agree with you, eh?" he dismissed. "Me, I like 'em, maybe because I never saw enough of 'em to feel different—"

"Same here," Sadler put in, turning to look at the still immobile brakeman. "I got nothing against the mountains themselves, but—O, well—we'll hop off when the train strikes that climb. O. K?"

"O. K." agreed Skeets Donnelly, his gaze wide, lithe shoulders. "When the train hits the grade. What's that down there—a town?"

"Town it is!" said Bill Sadler, steadying himself again. It would be a long walk and he was feeling queer. Two days without food, and little for a week before that—

They reached the town by nightfall and

were impressed by its atmosphere—the sense of high spirits about the place. The altitude accounted for part of these spirits, for Cuphandle City was two thousand feet above the level of the great Pacific rollers that sprayed upon the coast to the west. And they arrived on the evening of Hercules Day. Hercules Day, coming well along in autumn, meant added crispness in the marvellous air, the healthful repute of which brought tourists from forty-eight states, in forty-eight different makes of car, to the environs of Cup Valley. Hercules Day also meant the paying of bonuses to employees of the concern that was the backbone of the town at entrance to Cup Valley. Lumberjacks, teamsters, hotel employees, clerks of the string of red painted stores, trim office stenographers, and natty lawyers, all made merry on Hercules Day. Hercules Industries, Inc. was more than a corporation to most of Cup Valley inhabitants—it was landlord, employer, educator, and entertainer.

SKEETS DONNELLY, one time favorite of the Chicago footlights, knew nothing of Cup Valley history. Skeets was merely curious, as he and William Sadler, very hungry and very dusty, paused in the dusty road to look up at the large cloth sign strung between the highest buildings on the outskirts of the town. It was late evening and the sign was boldly floodlighted.

"Welcome to Cuphandle City!" read Skeets. He waved an arm airily. "Welcome—Cuphandle City! Thrice welcome! Say, Bill," he continued with deep seriousness. "How'd you like to come face to face with the well known steak smothered in onions or mushrooms—how'd you like to down a few cocktails, and recline back in a plush comfort chair, looking at—well, we'll say, looking at a copy bunch of Ziegfeld's steppers? Bet they got 'em here, too—"

"Don't mention women to me!" growled

Bill, and Skeets caught a note of real feeling in the joking tone. "Women are out. The steak, now—Skeets—it's over forty-eight straight hours since I've tasted food."

"Serious, serious!" condoled Skeets, with deep gravity, as they passed along the street. "Alaska—your case is worse than mine. But let's explore the village. Perhaps it may yield us food—"

The dust gave way to pavement—wooden buildings to stone—a bank, office buildings, town hall—an hour of aimless moving brought the two wanderers back to the business center. Cuphandle City was merely a large town, modernized and compact. A pleasant place.

"Say," Sadler remarked at last, to his well dressed companion. "This starving act is losing the features of a joke. I'm hungry!"

"Yeah?" asked Skeets, as if greatly surprised. "So am I. What we gonna do about it?"

They paused in front of a delicatessen store, and Skeets' gaze ranged thoughtfully over a machine producing doughnuts very visibly, and dropping them very adroitly upon traveling trays.

"Nice display. Say, are you game? We go in—not here—some sweller joint—order our steak and trimmings, eat, and let Fate decide the rest. Why not?"

William Sadler moistened his lips, and shook his head.

"Nothing doing. I'm keeping out of jail. Alaska's my settling place—not California."

Skeets frowned a bit.

"But why Alaska? Don't tell me if you've got a real reason."

"I haven't. Only I promised someone I'd go there and make a million dollars inside of a year."

"Are you crazy?" asked Skeets seriously.

"Not yet," answered Bill Sadler. "Just riled, that's all. Double-crossed by Lady Luck, Skeets. Telling the whole story in

a few words—I took it on the chin, and went out. Unexpected.”

Skeets nodded.

“Tough break,” he sympathized as if details stood out very clear in his mind. “You’re a great story teller, Bill. I’ve got a story to tell myself—but I won’t. Like me, it doesn’t make sense.”

“Two of a kind, eh?” asked William Sadler, gazing at his companion closely for the first time. Skeets had an almost feminine figure, closely draped in a dress suit well fitted for a Broadway jazz club—though now very stained and not a little crumpled. Above the proper collaring was a keen, alert face, subtly humorous, reckless. People liked that face—it made them laugh—thousands had paid tribute to the wit it expressed.

“Two of a kind,” agreed Skeets. “What about that steak—Million Dollars? Do we get it?”

They moved along, regarded curiously by all who passed them.

For the first time Skeets saw a trace of bitterness in his companion’s smile.

“Joking!” he said, his tone metallic—“joking about something we really need. A meal. Half starved, clothes all messed up, wandering around like a pair of kids far from home and lost. Do you realize, Mr. Skeets, that you and I are dead ends?”

“Huh!” grinned Skeets, his eyes in shadow.

“Yes—dead ends—”

“Changed your mind about the eat first, try to collect after, act?”

“No. We’re not licked yet.” Sadler’s jaw was set hard. “When a man drops down to do a thing like that, he’s on the ropes. We’re not there yet. What I want is money—money to take me to Alaska. No reason—except that for two months every try I’ve made to reach Alaska has been blocked—”

“You can’t beat luck, Big Boy,” stated Skeets, watching the set of the hard jaw. “I know.”

“I’ve heard of that before. And I don’t believe it. What are you—a fatalist?”

“Yes,” said Skeets coldly. “What of it?”

“Nothing—except that I’ve lost my good opinion of you, that’s all. Are you sticking with me or do we split?”

“I’m sticking, Million Dollars,” said Skeets. “You’re too interesting to part with. We eat or starve together.”

“Good!” approved Bill Sadler. “Now to business.”

HE slowed his walk, paused altogether, as if to better express himself. Just ahead a knot of people were crowding about a doorway—a narrow entrance flanked by a sign which drew William Sadler’s gaze, and shaped his ideas.

“What we need is money—money for food, clothes, and traveling expenses, mine anyway. Let’s form a company—Sadler and—what is it—Donnelly? Well—Donnelly—here we are in a little city, apparently as lively on a Tuesday as most of ’em are on a Saturday night. There must be opportunities in a place like this. What can we do, Donnelly?”

Donnelly thought.

“Me—I can do Shakespeare, Shaw or O’Neil equally bad. I can crack jokes, dance, sing a little. If put to it, I can serve as waiter, bell hop—anything. That’s what you mean, isn’t it? You’re talking about *work*?”

“Exactly,” replied Sadler, of Sadler and Donnelly, his gaze leaving the sign to regard the other intently. So Skeets was an actor. An actor. William Sadler wondered at the strangeness of life, life that only two months before had been tame and familiar. Aloud he remarked—“Exactly. Work. We want our money come by honestly—”

“What can you do?” asked Skeets with real curiosity—“besides knocking brake-men cold?”

“Not much,” confessed Bill Sadler. “I can do a few other things, but I’ve never been paid for them. But I *can* knock men

out. And that's worth money to us—more than waiting in restaurants or hopping in hotels. Understand? I was once started on the road to ring fame, Skeets, when—well—when things broke—”

“Boxer, eh? But where will tonight's steak come in? You'll have to find a Club that puts on boxing shows—train—”

“Look at that,” advised William Sadler, waving to the sign. A policeman, who had been watching them both, finally made up his mind, and approached.

“You can't hang around here like this, boys!” he said. “If you're not goin' in, move along!”

“But we *are* going in!” grinned Skeets.

On the narrow stairway that led up to the Hercules Athletic Club he voiced his opinion. “Talk about luck! Fifty dollars! Fifty dollars! Fifty whole dollars!” A thought sobered him. “But say, Alaska—how do you feel? Two days without eating—”

“Oh, I'm O. K.” lied William Sadler. “I'll get the fifty.”

CHAPTER II

THE Hercules Athletic Club, of Cuphandle City, was a somewhat unique institution. It was alone of its kind in the peak-locked valley, and was used by types as divergent as George Selkirk and his crew boss Cameron. Selkirk, supervisor of the Hercules Lumber camps in the hills, visited the gym regularly to don gym clothes and toss basketballs about for five strenuous minutes. George Selkirk believed in physical culture. He believed in anything, provided the belief did not call for really hard work. Brick Cameron had no beliefs whatever. He was all animal, devoid of guiding intelligence. Small, carefully guarded voices in Cuphandle City whispered that Selkirk had never seen a peavy pole before coming to the valley—he had come with his chauffeur and a quartet of peak capped individuals

who had organized and subsequently maintained the Hercules A. C. as result of some shift in the controlling interests of the corporation. A sudden, masterly bulling of the San Francisco exchange at the moment Hercules stock was lowest, wholesale buying of dropped shares, and outright purchase at par prices from holders, and the directing board had found itself ruled from a certain New York brokerage office. Behind that office was a name—a potent name, with millions at its command. The name was also connected with an organizing power that immediately changed conditions in Cup Valley. Certain lax affairs were tightened up—an accountant visited the chain of stores and the hotel;—men were discharged and men hired, and George Selkirk came to handle the lumber interests in the valley. Part of Selkirk's orders, it was generally understood, was to buy out all competition in the locality. But in this respect the natty manager had not so far met with any remarkable success.

Pop Hemingway, who owned the fir and pine tracts over the first lifts, had ideas of his own. Hemingway, by reason of an ancestor's lucky purchase when the Cascades were a howling wilderness, also owned the Assai Redwoods, a magnificent stand of trees on the ridges and drops north of Cup Valley. Pop would sell all his property or none. And for all his property he asked quite a figure. At least, Cup Valley surmised so, because Selkirk would not buy. The carefully guarded voices said Selkirk had ways of beating down prices, but carefully guarded voices are not too influential. And George Selkirk, well tailored, driven about in a long, low, rakish car by a uniformed chauffeur, was a refined figure hard to connect with such crudities. Much of old Hemingway's grudge against the Hercules could be laid to the fact that the larger concern was crowding him out of the market, with lower foot prices and wider range of timber kinds—legitimate business. Old Pop

was on the losing end of the fight, and was showing hard feelings. The general opinion was that Hemingway was a fool not to sell out. He was old, and unfit for the very uneven fight he insisted upon waging. And his support was handicapped. Margie Hemingway was a wonder—on one could deny that—but such a state of affairs had need of men, and strong men. No woman could make headway against the Hercules.

All these much discussed details of the lumbering situation in the valley were being discussed anew on the evening of Hercules Day, in the smoke filled, crowded interior of the athletic club. Crowds at athletic club shows are usually free from speculations regarding business, but this particular night the hum of talk was incessant, subdued. Margie Hemingway herself was present, surrounded by her swamping crew—rough shirted, capable looking individuals who gazed hostilely around the crowded gym. A steady stream of people kept entering thru the aperture at the top of the narrow stairs—Selkirk himself came in, nodded pleasantly to the daughter of his rival in industry, and turned away with a smile at her frankly unfriendly regard. Selkirk could afford to smile. Pushing thru the packed mob, he ran into a short, thick-set man.

"Oh, Rolli! How about putting the affair thru? Close the doors—the place is jammed now."

Rolli looked disgusted, and after leading the other to the office at the end of the great room, growled his reasons.

"Selkirk—we're on the laugh end tonight." He sat behind the office desk, spread a deprecatory hand. "Brick hurt his wrist coming in from Baywood. I told him to have that lizzie's starter fixed! Goes out to crank, and bang! Crippled, that's all. Brick's so mad he could chew nails—but we can't put him in against that Swede with one hand. Hemingway takes the night. Hell of a note!"

Selkirk frowned a bit. He cared neith-

er for Brick's wrist, nor very much who was the best fighter in Cup Valley—a Hemingway or a Hercules man. But, because of a certain humiliating episode, he did like to see Margie Hemingway frustrated in every way possible. And the girl was in that place solely out of loyalty—Selkirk knew that the accumulated emotions of months was behind a desire to see her big timberjack carry off the distinction of being the best man with his hands in the Valley. Because of that one galling memory of rebuff Selkirk frowned at Rolli's news.

"No other man—good enough for that Swede?" he asked.

Rolli sullenly shook his head.

"Naw. He's strong as a bull. Brick himself would have to go some if they went at it somewhere in the woods, man to man, with nothing barred. But in a ring—Brick knows the game, see? He'd 'a' beat the Swede so easy an' so bad that crew would never forget it." Rolli gazed disgustedly out of the square glass in the door, to the confused crowd, seated and standing around the raised, roped platform of the fight ring.

Selkirk took a chair, placed his feet on the flat, heavy desk, lit a cigarette, and blew smoke thoughtfully toward the ceiling.

"Let's see. This box fight isn't very important. Still, the Big Boss has a motto pasted on the inside of one of his desk drawers, in the holy of holies itself, where only Big Men enter, Rolli. The motto says—Give no advantage—use every advantage given. Of course the Big Boss doesn't know everything—but there's no flies on him, Rolli. I went to school working and living with him, and I've never once regretted what I learned. Give no advantage—use every advantage given. Get it? So far, the Hercules has won every fight with Hemingway—of any kind. There's nothing, Rolli, that discourages a man like being beaten *all* the time. Even one little

taste of victory, once in a while, keeps the fighting spirit up, and Hemingway is a fighter. We can't afford to let him have any encouragement whatever. If Big Jan is beaten tonight by a Hercules man, his logging mates will feel it—it will be another straw on the camel's back bringing us nearer to the break. The break is what we want—"

Rolli swung around in his chair. The man's dark face worked sullenly to his feelings.

"Why don't you let me an' Kiki—"

"No!" dismissed Selkirk at once. "No need of that stuff, yet Rolli. Just go along as we have—"

"This damn gym!" growled Rolli. "Showin' fat fools how to bend—I'm sick of it!"

"You're getting paid for it, aren't you?" asked Selkirk coldly. "Forget the gunning itch, Rolli, and play this right. Now, this fight—how to fix it? Call it off? Get a doctor to speak for Brick?"

Rolli fished the half of a long, thin Italian cigar from his pocket, and lit the murderous weed.

"I hate to do it. That bunch will say some pretty nasty things. It's three months the whole valley's waitin' for this scrap. If we could put in somebody to get this Jan—say—there's One Round La Farge in Baywood!" The speaker leaned across the desk. "There we are! Get La Farge to put this big sap out—say he's a Hercules man—an' by the time the word spreads that he's a pro, Brick'll be all set again, to finish Jan for keeps. How's that?"

"Great!" agreed Selkirk. He glanced out the door, down to a watch on his wrist. "But how to get this La Farge in from Baywood? It's too late. Oh!" he shrugged with a sudden impatience. "Let it go, Rolli! Get Brick into the ring to explain. If they won't believe, let them go to the devil! After all, it's hardly a thing to worry about. Put the show on, give the fifties to

the winners, clear the place for a dance afterwards, and make it a big Hercules night anyhow. Let 'em talk! If they talk too much, we'll have an excuse to send the boys over some night for a cleanup, and the Hemingway logs won't go down-river as soon as they might." He rose with an expression of weariness. "Handle all this yourself, Joe. I'm going up to the hotel. Send Brick in to me if you see him."

ROLLI put the show on. He said nothing of Brick Cameron's damaged wrist, and before the second bout of the night went on the canvas, was thankful for his hunch. Rolli had not suspected that Panama Joe Sesta was in Cuphandle City.

True, Rolli had never heard of Panama Joe Sesta, nor his manager Donelli. But the world was full of fighters whose names missed the sport writers; and fighters, Rolli knew, often went suddenly broke, so they could be wearing expensive suits crumbled to soiled frazzles.

Rolli found them near the doorway, studying the scene, and attracting quite a bit of attention. Someone was pointing him out to them. The first fight on the smoketalk bill was just ending, and a murmur of renewed comment rose all about. Rolli strode over to meet the taller of the two.

"Are you in charge here?" he was asked.

"Yeah. What do you want?"

"I saw a sign out there—offering fifty dollars to all winners of bouts put on here tonight."

Rolli grunted.

"Got to be matched. Should have taken that sign out yesterday. All bouts fixed." About to turn away, he stopped, appraised the other closely. "How heavy?"

"One hundred eighty-five—two weeks ago."

A thought scratched at Rolli's mental borders.

"Ever fight before? We can't bother with dubs."

William Sadler, wondering what was the matter with his legs, thought of a steak smothered in onions, and drew upon his imagination.

"Dub?" he scorned. "Me? Fighting is my business!" He caught himself. "Professionals barred here?"

The thought at Rolli's mental borders scratched louder.

"No. I could use a *good* professional," he said in a low tone.

William Sadler looked at Skeets, and grinned.

"Well—here I am. Panama Jos Sesta's my name. I'm stranded up here in these hills, brother—in need of fifty dollars. For fifty dollars I'll take on the pride of Cup-handle City."

"Yes sir!" snappily remarked the smaller man with Panama Joe Sesta. "Here we are. I'm Donelli, manager of the great Panama Joe—"

"Say!" growled Rolli, pursing ideas of his own. "Will you two guys step into my office?"

An hour later William Sadler, clad in tights and sneakers and knuckle tape, came out of the shower room, and wended a direct way to the ring corner, with Donelli and a youth burdened with bucket and towels behind. He clambered thru the ropes, and proved his power of will by flexing knees, and shuffling about in the resin, when a very insistent feeling tugged at him to sit down. William Sadler wondered what was the matter with himself. He had read somewhere that men could go easily for weeks without eating. Evidently he was not of that heroic breed. His legs were not what they might have been. Visions of a gravy bathed steak was a real, vivid image before him.

He finally sat down, relaxed. A stillness had come over the crowd.

"Say!" whispered Skeets, alias Donelli, as he fitted the gloves on Joe Sesta's hands. "Say, Alaska—you sure you can carry this thru? That twin brother of Al Capone

says this Swede is a human grizzly bear! And you haven't eaten for forty-eight hours!"

"Don't mention eating!" growled William Sadler. "I don't care if the Swede is a whole zoo. I'm walking out of this place with fifty dollars! Got those salts handy?"

"Yeah," grunted Skeets, and stared at the giant clambering thru the opposite corner. "Suffering Saracens! Alaska—you'll earn that fifty!"

William Sadler's grin tightened slightly.

HE had seen big men before, across the lighted square of rings. But none like the big Swede he had to dispose of in order to eat. The simile of the grizzly bear came back to his mind. A hulking, hairy, huge muscled brute, his opponent glowered at him across the twenty feet of lighted space. William Sadler kept his grin. He also rose, expecting the usual custom of handshaking, then remembered.

He was not in the Milo now—not the masked amateur who had set Manhattan buzzing with conjectures for years. Fighting had been play then—an amusing game. Now it was a grim, stark problem. William Sadler almost questioned the reality of it all. The packed crowd—the smoke thickened air—his gaze rested on a surprisingly attractive face, close to the ropes on opposite side. Idly he noticed how incongruous the girl's surroundings seemed—a well dressed, feminine figure she made, in the midst of that rough shirted and bearded crowd. Beyond her were row on row of silent spectators—the walls. Beyond the walls was the little hill city—the Cascades—nearly three thousand miles from that home on Long Island—with sudden grip of will William Sadler stopped his thoughts. The smile on his lips tightened, grew bitter, hard.

Joe Rolli entered the ring, waved a hand aloft.

"I know you're all wonderin' who this

feller is in Brick's place," he addressed upturned and questioning faces. "I'm sorry to say what every Hercules man will be sorry to hear—Brick can't go on tonight!" He paused to let the low mutter die down. "Brick hurt his wrist crankin' a car not three hours ago, an' is in Dr. Selby's office now—got to soak it, or somethin'. Just called up. Might be up here anytime, to talk for himself. Anyway—to save the show—to prove that the Hercules don't back out of what a real fightin' challenge, we got a man to fight Big Jan! We got him in this corner—Joe Sesta—a logger Brick hired two days ago—willing to take the Swede on! He's standin' up for Brick. Get it? If Big Jan wins he's the best man with his hands in Cup Valley—"

"Till Brick gets better!" shouted someone from the rear, and the words were repeated in low, sullen disapproval by scattered groups standing along the wall. The men around Margie Hemingway looked at one another, frowning. The girl herself did not move—tho her lips curled as one of her jacks voiced his suspicions.

"That feller's no logger! He don't belong in Cup Valley! What you do, Rolli—hire a glove fighter to do what Brick can't? Go ahead! Jan'll take him!"

"Sure!" The low, general growl went up, from around the girl—came from Big Jan himself, as he scowled across the ring with added belligerency. William Sadler forgot a certain day in a home on Long Island. Evidently two opposing factions composed that fight crowd.

"Say!" whispered Skeets. "I don't like this, Alaska! Did you ever see such a collection of tough looking characters? Capone said it was a grudge mixup, and your act was to be a lumberjack fighting for your company. Suppose—"

You keep quiet!" suggested William Sadler.

"But where's the cops?" persisted

Skeets. "And who'll referee this fight? If that big grizzly begins to rough you—"

"He'll get hurt!" promised William Sadler, trying to forget the strange laxness in his muscles. "Rolli's going to Referee this fight himself. But don't worry, Donelli—Panama Joe Sesta knows his game." He rose at Rolli's wave, stepped forward, fighting to keep his motions steady. Big Jan met him in midring, and together they listened to Rolli's advice. Close up, William Sadler studied his opponent, looked into bleak light eyes beneath a wild mop of yellow hair. And because what he saw was unpleasant, William Sadler grinned, tho the grin was a bit thin.

Big Jan was a huge, knotted mass of iron muscle. He seemed to exclude animal vitality. He certainly had not gone some fifty hours without eating. William Sadler smiled because of his queer physical sensations—smiled because it was an instinct in the Sadler blood to smile when things grew tight. And things were certainly tight now. Waiting for the bell, he understood for the first time meanings behind the expression he had often seen on the faces of men in opposite corner—men already beaten, bolstered by nerve alone. His gaze went across the ring—down to a winsome featured face set in very unwinsome expression, and curiously, he thought of Roman pleasure parties out for a day's entertainment at the Colosseum—of scornful high ladies surrounded by legionary guards, enjoying the pain of gladiatorial shows.

William Sadler gripped himself, hard. His thoughts were playing him tricks. Rome—what a comparison! But fifty hours—and a hot dog as basis—beyond the hot dog a previous day of emptiness—William Sadler heaved erect as the bell clanged, and Big Jan lumbered out. Rome or Cup-handle City, the prospect was apparently one of thumbs down.

CHAPTER III

BIG JAN, champion rough and tumble fighter of the Cascade timberlands, had not achieved the reputation by proxy. He was an incredibly strong man. William Sadler caught the strength the instant his first light leads slipped off the Swede's awkward guard. Years of life close to the very beasts of the earth had made Big Jan—years of ax swinging, of simple food and clean air and man sized frays that had moulded his natural vigor. He outweighed his opponent by close to fifty pounds, and the manner in which he set to work brought roars of applause from his bunkmates of the Hemingway tracts.

Bill Sadler slipped out of that flurry of oak beam, flailing arms, his head buzzing dully. With the ungainly and deceptive speed of a grizzly, Big Jan followed up. He drove the Hercules representative to the ropes, smashed him down. The roar of applause sounded prolonged, sustained, as Rolli, frowning blackly, began his count. From Bill Sadler's corner Skeets gazed alternately down to his friend's writhing figure and over to the yelling, rough clad men, and Skeets' thoughts were strange thoughts for a one hundred and forty pound actor to entertain. "Get up, Alaska!" he pleaded earnestly. "You can handle that big cow! Come on!"

Alaska got up. Almost with a jerk, as if his groping will had suddenly caught hold of his body. Big Jan's flailing blows missed, again and again, as a cunning foot and headwork kept William Sadler erect. Rolli's frown did not entirely pass. Panama Joe Sesta evidently knew the game, but he was no fighter.

Big Jan's efforts grew with his rage. More and more his huge, striking form came to resemble that of some upright and snarling animal bent on destroying its prey. The startling simile came to Margie Hemingway, and despite her feud loyalty,

brought a sort of pitying horror to her eyes. Hired pug or no, Joe Sesta was a man on the losing end, a man without a chance. But her pity soon ebbed.

Bill Sadler, one time heavyweight hope was thinking, his head gradually clearing. He had to earn that fifty dollars. Big Jan merely looked awkward. He was surprisingly quick, and he threw his punches with an almost ring like snap—the ax work had not tied him. William Sadler clinched, and strove to rally his flailing energies. Only the Sadler confidence stood between him and defeat. He was already whipped—his arms leaden, legs unsteady. And Big Jan was a mass of wild vitality. His grip crushed Sadler—Rolli's efforts to stop the rough, mauling interlock brought an angry roar for the group below the ropes. Bill Sadler broke away, and smiled. It was time to begin fighting, he told himself—the best time to begin fighting was when one was thoroughly whipped. Big Jan's flailing arms toppled him back. The bell saved him.

"Call it off! It's murder! Why—you're starved sick, Alaska—if you wasn't—"

"Shut up!" said Young Sadler, and smiled. Skeets thought of a certain moment in a box car and relaxed. Alaska was angry now.

Big Jan came out to finish a very good start. He fairly charged across the ring—charged into a vicious hook that snapped his tousled head back with a violence that brought a sudden, amazed silence from the gathering. Rolli almost shouted approval. Panama Joe Sesta could hit, occasionally.

Big Jan recovered, closed in again, two hundred and thirty pounds of berserk energy. Sadler, his senses clear, crystal clear, calmly calculating his weakness and the other's strength as an engineer calculates mechanical forces, began to fight. The group around Margie Hemingway ceased shouting—those along the walls roared approval.

The girl's face gradually paled. Above

the ring a single high amperage bulb poured down its illumination over the two half naked figures battling in the smoke haze. Margie Hemingway was twentieth century in all things, but the twentieth century veneer seemed to slip from her during the next ten minutes. She had seen fights—even one memorable struggle in the big woods, devoid of rules or limitations—yet this one was different. Every person in the gym gradually caught the feeling, and the roars of approval soon ebbed to queer, suspended silence which carried clearly the animal grunts of the raging Jan, the sharp smacks of hard driven leather colliding with bare flesh.

Bill Sadler, his brain functioning with automatic sureness began to fight. Deliberately he called on every bit of the skill which had made his few months in the prize ring game really sensational. He slipped Big Jan's roundhouse rights over a dropping, inward sweeping left shoulder—blocked the clumsier lefts with little sharp dabs of his right glove into the swede's swelling biceps at the start of each blow. Methodically, coolly as a stone cutter chipping at granite, his left flashed out, a rigid, quick stabbing that kept the glove in Jan's eyes, and regularly, at timed intervals, the blocking right would curve upward with a vicious snap full against the lumberjack's jaw. William Sadler regretted the solitary hot dog that backed that deadly, snapping hook—for William Sadler was angry now.

Skeets, his fascinated gaze on a smile that expressed a wicked enjoyment, knew that Sadler was angry. But Jan was tougher than the brakeman.

It was a queer fight. Everyone sensed it. Joe Sesta made one motion to Big Jan's four—he moved without spring, seemed saving his energy to occasionally throw it into that upsnapping right hook that began to mess Jan's hard features. And Big Jan was showing how purely berserk a man can become. Yet of the two it was

Sesta who impressed most as the affair went on. With eyes now wide in horror Margie Hemingway gazed at the cruelly smiling lips—winced with each sudden, surging pivot of a clean muscled torso that drove that deadly right glove up into her jack's battered face. A dull protest struggled up within her. Would it never end?

They went thru one round, two, three and the big Swede, his supremacy gone, became a gory sight of futile ferocity, gradually weakening, beginning to shrink from that sudden, vicious smash he did not know how to avoid. The silence had become painful. Then, well along in the fourth round, someone yelled a hoarse, "stop the fight!" an explosion of feeling that found echo from many who were present out of mere curiosity.

Margie Hemingway found herself erect.

"Yes, stop it! Stop it!" she cried in rising repetition. "Boys—stop it!"

The boys, sullen faced, scowling, surged up around her. The movement brought instant response from back of the hall, and the Hercules men ploughed a lane thru the crowd, their individual replies to the challenge joined to make a deep, concerted growl. The bell clanged thinly in the uproar, a minute ahead of time, and the timekeeper, a thin faced, capped fellow, faced around, his hand going down to a convenient coat pocket. A policeman's whistle shrilled out in the doorway, once, again, and its possessor, a bit pale, fought his way to the ring, club drawn, hoping the help he had summoned would not delay too long. The timbermen were bad customers in a free for all.

HERE—here!" cried an authoritative voice. "Stop this, boys! None of that on Hercules Day!" George Selkirk came thru to join the policeman, followed by a big, light stepping man with hair showing red at the temples below his hat, and who kept one hand, bandaged about the wrist, in the front of his coat. Thin

echoes of the policeman's whistle were sounding from the street, on the stairs, and soon the ring was guarded by a line of determined bluecoats.

"Easy, boys!" a spokesman warned. "We'll have none of your hill wars here in town!"

"I should say not!" asserted George Selkirk very emphatically. He turned with a surprised air to the girl. "What's the trouble, Miss Hemingway? Cameron and I just got in, and were watching the fight. It looked O. K. to us, except, of course, that your man was hopelessly out-classed. If you wanted it stopped—why not have the seconds toss the towel—"

The girl's eyes, their usually soft blue now hard with an unspeakable contempt, surveyed Selkirk from nattily shod feet to the soft, swagger style hat which topped his faultlessly trimmed hair.

"Oh!" she remarked, her clear voice metallic. "So that's the way you stop these things? Pardon my ignorance. I called the boys merely on impulse—not with any wish to start trouble. The police chief is too friendly with Hercules paid selectmen for me to think of starting trouble down here—"

"Now, Miss Hemingway—" smiled Selkirk irritantly—

"Don't Miss Hemingway me, you crooked hypocrite!" the girl blazed, her control breaking. "Boys—" she turned—"get Jan away! He's got no chance against that hired brute!"

"Say!" William Sadler, who had been hanging on the ropes an attentive if somewhat weak listener, began to clamber down. Selkirk, still smiling, had turned to the restless men behind and was advising them to steer clear of all trouble with the Hemingway outfit. Brick Cameron growled a conclusive order—a surly snap of voice which showed the quality of his authority over his crews, then turned to watch Joe Sesta. Brick was interested in the man who had been whipping Big Jan very neatly as

he had entered with Selkirk. His grey, hard eyes studied William Sadler, who was entirely unaware of the scrutiny; William Sadler was at that moment intent on keeping control of his reeling senses. Something was wrong, somewhere.

"Say!" he called after the girl already moving along. "Miss Hemingway!"

"Lay off!" advised Skeets, reaching his side. "What do we care what all the noise is about? You get the fifty, and change some of it into food quick, before you drop. You're as white as a sheet right now!"

"Miss Hemingway!" persisted William Sadler, who was somewhat stubborn by nature.

The girl turned. Sadler was conscious of a questioning, cold regard, a contempt so plain it halted him, so that he groped for words.

"Mr. Sesta," she informed him with a vacant politeness more cutting than any abuse. "I really don't speak to your kind."

That was all. The crowd swallowed her up, and Bill Sadler stood gazing vacantly after her.

"Get that fifty!" prodded Skeets.

Sadler's knees suddenly buckled, but he fought off the wave of nausea.

"I can't faint now, Donelli," he grinned a bit wanly. "Not after *that*. Did you hear what she said to me?"

"Let me congratulate you, my man!" George Selkirk remarked with genuine satisfaction, striding over. "Joe just told me—" his words trailed, a look of blank astonishment swept the self complacency from his features. Skeets had never seen a man so completely, utterly surprised. "Bill Sadler!" he almost gasped. "Why—what?—"

"That's what I'd like to know, George," agreed Young Sadler a bit stiffly, as he turned. "Didn't recognize me in this rig up, eh? Well," he continued, his face flushing, "it's me all right. Large as life, and as empty. May I ask what you are doing here, giving orders, and being called

a crooked hypocrite by young women? Thought you were marrying Esther sometime this month?"

"O, we postponed it. But—Bill Sadler—" Selkirk assumed control of himself. "Pardon my surprise, Bill, I'm here on—" he gazed intently at Sadler, and finished shortly—"on business. Esther and I won't marry till New Year's. And that young woman—just a poor loser. But you, Bill—here—fighting—what a surprise that was! I can't believe it yet. Did you say something about being empty?" he asked, lights of somewhat satisfied superiority in his eyes.

"No!" lied William Sadler, smiling. "Nothing of the kind, George. Well," he turned to Skeets. "It's the outside for us. Where's that shower room?"

"Bill Sadler!" mused Selkirk. "Of all people! Are you in need of work, Bill?" Swiftly his face paled as the other turned. Skeets saw fear lick up to the contemptuous eyes, and looking at Sadler, he understood. Sadler was smiling, and the smile held a wicked enjoyment.

"No, George," he replied evenly. "I hate work. Skeets—get that fifty dollars while I dress, will you?"

HALF an hour later a waiter in the Empire restaurant brought a check for two full course dinners to a certain table, and was half surprised at the prompt payment. Skeets and William Sadler, their soiled and crumpled clothes making them targets for all eyes, strolled slowly out, as if curious glances were things far too trifling to notice. Skeets whistled a lilting dancehall song up toward the sky as they moved down the sidewalk.

"Nice little place, Bill," he commented, between notes. "You can actually see stars from Main Street. In Chicago, now—"

"Chicago, eh?" asked William Sadler almost heartily. Food could do wonderful things for a man.

"Yeup—Chicago! But why talk of

what's past? It's the future, Willie boy, that should occupy the minds of thoughtful men. Alaska for us—Alaska, land of gold and the malemute—"

"We're not going to Alaska," informed William Sadler. "Not me, anyway."

Skeets paused. They were passing under a theatre arcade, and passerby gazed curiously at their soiled, disheveled appearance. Skeets looked indignant.

"Say—what kind of a partner are you? Are you backing out on me now? You know how set I was on going to Alaska?"

Sadler grinned. The longer he stayed with Skeets Donnelly the better he liked the man.

"I know. I tried to humor you—but—something's come up that makes it impossible for me to go. I'm staying here, Skeets—right in Cuphandle City—"

"Where men are men, and the women don't appreciate it," muttered Skeets, his gaze on Sadler's slightly bruised face. "What's the 'something'? That girl, or George?"

"Both," replied Sadler evenly. "Skeets—I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to tell you a story—in a few words. In all my life I've disliked but one man, and asking that man for something is like taking poison. But tomorrow, Skeets, yours truly is going to ask George Selkirk for a job. What do you think of that?"

"Great!" enthused Skeets. "Nobody can beat you when it comes to telling stories, William. So George's name is Selkirk? That's some progress, anyway. And speaking of jobs—how about little Skeets? Let me tell you a story!" he interrupted Sadler's remonstrance. "In all my life there's been one thing I didn't like—a job in a little town. But tomorrow yours truly is offering his talents to Cuphandle City, What do you think of it?"

"Great!" grinned William Sadler. Then, seriously—"Say, Skeets—can you fight?"

"Fight?" Skeets cloaked his surprise. "I played a Jesse James part in 'Outlawed

Love" so well the racketeers back home began bidding for my services. Fight? Huh!" Skeets gazed again at William Sadler. "Say—what's up, Bill? Who we going to fight?"

"Hard telling," evaded Sadler. "You know the world, Skeets. If someone closes down on a man, that man's friends generally come in for the same treatment. I only want to warn you that sticking with me may involve you in trouble."

"Oh—that so? Well—I'm warned. And you'll find me sticking, William. But why the serious talk, tonight? Didn't *we* win fifty dollars? And haven't we got forty six of it left? Let's take in this show—here—look at that—'Fighting Blood.' Let's go in and take notes on our future business—"

"No," disagreed William Sadler. "What we want to find is a Chinaman with a good pressing machine. Or else the local Chamber of Commerce will deport us for disgracing the town. Come on—I saw one about a block from here."

CHAPTER IV.

BOTH Sadler and Skeets found their jobs, and things concerned with the jobs, in the course of a week. Time sums up its measures as steadily in the big hills as in the faster moving environment of the big cities, and fills those measures with events. Because of these events Sadler, almost broken in the details of lumbering, welcomed Brick Cameron's surly order to accompany him to town for supplies three days after his joining the Hercules crew in the hills.

And because of these same events Margie Hemingway walked firmly down Cuphandle's main street toward the Hercules A. C. a scant week after the night Big Jan had lost to her rival's hired fighter. Margie's spirited nature was stirred to its depths, and her feelings showed in the quick, determined decisiveness of her stride—sounded in the tap, tap, tap of little

heels on the sidewalk—in the set of her proudly poised head. Young men turned to stare admiringly after her—and one young man, coming down the stairs of a lunch car, did more than stare. He followed his surprised look with action—cut across the girl's path.

"Miss Hemingway—"

Margie stopped, and froze. Some things were too presumptuous for comprehension.

"Miss Heminway—I'd like to talk to you—somewhere—alone—"

The blue, scornful eyes surveyed logging boots, heavy trousers, a mackinaw shirt, and the face of William Sadler.

"Are you crazy?" she asked with sincere curiosity.

"Not yet. I'm very much in earnest."

Little frowns puckered the girl's brow.

"You talk like a gentleman—surprisingly like a gentleman, for a Hercules thug—"

"Thug?" remonstrated Bill Sadler.

"That's the very word. And furthermore, understand this—if you ever speak to me again, I will have you arrested. Do not think that is funny. Crooked town politics can't shield your miserable crew any longer. I'm going out of the country for help—and I'm going to get it! Do you think you can get away with another outrage like last nights? Try it! Try it!" she blazed at him. "There's guns waiting for you past the ridge now—and orders to shoot those guns. Pop Hemingway never failed to fill a contract, and he cannot be made to fail! Understand? That is what I'm going to tell your employers now. What will they have to say?"

Bill Sadler drew a deep breath. A noon-day sun flooded Cuphandle City's main street, and he suddenly realized that Cuphandle City was a surprisingly pleasant place.

"I don't know what *they* will have to say," he replied, "but I—"

"I'm not interested in what *you* have to say. Parrots never interest me. Just re-

member those guns, Mr. —Sesta? They're waiting for you."

Tap, tap, tap, her heels went down the street. William Sadler half started after her, then stopped, shrugging wide shoulders beneath the mackinaw shirt. He thought a moment, shrugged again, and went searching in his pockets for a cigaret. Lighting it, he moved off the sidewalk center, and leaned carelessly against the lunch car, his gaze on the vehicles passing up and down the street.

"You don't amount to anything!" he informed himself, and grinned. "You parrot!" The humor of it brought forth an amazed grunt. "Can you beat it? You've sunk pretty low, William—pretty low." His grey, steady eyes hardened a trifle. "So something happened last night? And Brick and the engine crew got in late—" he ceased his cogitating mutter, tossed aside the half smoked cigaret, and began to walk up toward the Savoy Hotel. "I'd better see Skeets right now," he decided.

He found Skeets in the lobby, reading on a lounge, well tailored legs showing beneath an outspread newspaper. At sound of Sadler's voice the paper lowered, and Skeets rose.

"Hello, Bill!" he greeted genially. "You certainly look rough in that rig, boy," he went on. "When they passed out shoulders you grabbed an extra good pair. Well—what's been doing up among the forest giants?"

"That's right," agreed Bill. "Skeets—I never saw *trees* before! But that's neither here nor there. What would you do if a beautiful girl, without the question of a doubt, the most beautiful girl, and also the hardest to talk to, in the world, called you a parrot?"

Skeets' brows went up.

"I'd never talk again. Where is this scornful Diana? Or, better—why bother with women when engaged in war? Three days ago you were smelling something overripe in the Hercules Lumber Co.—

here, sit down—" he followed Sadler's example—"what was it—a false lead?"

"No," answered William Sadler in a curiously cold tone. "It was a straight lead, Skeets. What I've found out in the last three days have cinched my suspicions. But I've also found out something that's nearly floored me. Don't know but I may go on to Alaska, at that."

"Why not?" asked Skeets, calmly.

Sadler's hand dropped on his shoulder.

"Donnelly—you're a white man! I could tell you a pretty queer story—but what's the use? Personal troubles are tiresome—just this—what would you do, Skeets—if somebody you were pretty close to and dependant upon raised a row over things you know nothing about, and broke up the relation. Suppose, thousands of miles away, you stumble into affairs concernig that person, with complications that are very interesting? Would you stop to fight for that someone's interests—protect them from graft worked by another whom he has placed before you—a man he'd held up to you as an example? Would you do it?"

"Depends," replied Skeets. "Some men I know call a girl the most beautiful girl in the world after she calls them parrots. How about that? And besides, William—wouldn't there be some satisfaction in showing this example up? All right, Bill," he interrupted Sadler's impulse. "Don't give anything away. We don't need the details of stories—just the general idea. The the general idea here is you want a straight line on George Selkirk—your boss. Our agreement was to split the fight, fifty-fifty. You took the hills, and the rough and tumble act—I took the town and the Sherlock Holmes methods. Well—Sherlock reports that the Hercules A. C. is run by a New York mob—gangsters—regular rod men—paid by Selkirk. His chauffeur—Kiki—and Joe Rolli—are bad eggs, and Cameron, you know him. How'd I find out? I didn't. That dancing partner of

mine, Dolly, found out for me. She's a square shooter, that kid, Bill. Took a liking to me, somehow, and I can't rid her of it—"

"Why rid her of it? Anything wrong?"

"No. I said she was square—saving money for the time she meets her man—likes nothing better than a little home somewhere, shaded with trees—queerest kid you ever heard talk. It's me. I can't tangle with women, Bill. I'm no good—"

"Huh?" growled William Sadler. "Skeets—you're not one of these hypocrites, are you, trying to dodge life?"

"Shut up!" snapped Skeets. "You don't know what you're talking about. Think I'd be doing a ham dance in a small town restaurant if I was O. K.? Me? Sadler, Whatever the fact's worth, Skeets Donnelly has played the thousand a week circuits in the big towns. But he didn't last. Bill—my story's got no details. It's simple. I'm a booze fighter. No good."

William Sadler's eyes were cold.

"You're a liar!" he informed evenly. "Skeets—I've known you a week—met you in a freight car—but this is how I feel. If this Dolly's just another girl, O. K. If you're just rolling along, O. K. But if this kid takes hold of you—if you begin to regret things, and yet stay with the idea that you can't lick booze—you know what I'll do?"

"What?" asked Skeets, interested.

"I'll knock your block off. That's straight. I'll manhandle you—"

Skeets grinned.

"Think you can do it?" he queried, looking at disturbingly wide shoulders. "Don't forget you're only a parrot—" he sobered swiftly. "Straight goods, Bill—I wish you'd do it! You're medicine to me, big boy. I haven't tasted a drop of Volstead puzzle since I met you. Too interested. Do you realize that for a week, it's been just what the poet said life was, 'one damned thing after another'? Why—I dream of nights I'm roughing it all over a floor or a ground

with Cameron and Selkirk and Rolli—regular hero act. Haven't got such a kick out of living since I was a kid."

"Don't try your dreams on Cameron," advised Sadler, his eyes going cold again. "He's a devil of a man, that crew boss. Regular slave driver—with a mean habit of hitting men unexpectedly in the face while talking to them—"

"He try that on you?" asked Skeets, tensing.

"Not yet. But he may, anytime. I've seen him do it, and he doesn't like the way I look at him after he's done it. If I wasn't playing a game up in those hills I'd go to the mat with him just on general principles. Without a word crossed between us, we've grown to hate each other—there's a strain comes over us both if we happen to touch in passing. And those timberjacks I bunk with know it. They're watching us every minute."

"Say—you haven't told me. Is that crew all crooked?"

"I don't think so. Three or four of 'em are—the rest just like to fight, and the Hemingway boys are their natural enemies. I've got to hold my temper, and play in with Cameron. He's got three or four men, the logging engine gang, who go out somewhere with him nights. And something happened on Hemingway property last night. The game is tightening, Skeets."

"Well—it's what we warriors want, isn't it—war—good, old fashioned war!" Skeets gazed down at his spotless apparel. "I'm a sad looking warrior, ain't I? Say—one thing, Bill. Is the line on this town gang important? Dolly can't get plenty of information off Kiki—Selkirk's chauffeur—but—I don't like the idea. She'd go thru anything for me, but—I don't like that. Not that Dolly means—"

"Of course not," agreed Sadler. "But you better steer her away from Kiki. I don't care much about the town graft anyway. It's the lumbering deal I want straight—and after I've straightened it—"

it's a desk for me, and a very expressive letter to someone. After that, Alaska, maybe."

"Maybe is right," remarked Skeets. "Before you sit down to write that letter, or after it, Cameron might try hitting you in the face while talking to you. That'll start something, won't it? And how about the girl who called you a parrot? You going to let a woman get away with that?"

William Sadler hid the look which entered his eyes. He leaned his rough shirt back against the plush of the lounge, ignoring the scowling desk clerk across the lobby.

"Wait and see," he advised enigmatically.

THE girl who called big men parrots kept on down street after the encounter with Panama Sesta, her proudly poised head not quite as proudly poised as it had been before the meeting. Margie was somewhat puzzled. Deep within her was a ridiculous desire to cry—a desire clothed over with a splendid defiance. Curiously, her meeting with Joe Sesta had heightened the crying impulse. The situation was bad enough, without being complicated with riddles. At the club entrance she turned, ascended the stairs without hesitation. Selkirk, at least, was not a riddle. Margie Hemingway, feminine to the tips of her fingers, knew again the wish that always came to her at thought of Selkirk—the wish to be a man, for five or ten minutes.

The gym door was ajar. Pushing thru, she gazed over the empty, huge room, her memory reconstructing a ring in its center—a blaze of light—two naked men struggling in the smoke haze. Impatiently she dismissed the thought. Riddle or not, Joe Sesta was a hired man. It was with his employers she had to deal.

Her heels tapped firmly on the solid flooring as she walked to the office. But evidently the sound did not reach those within, for the blend of two men's voices

came clearly to her as she involuntarily paused before knocking. One was Cameron's, and it was laden with so vicious an emotion that Margie's determination suffered a shock.

"I don't care who he is!" the crew boss was snarling. "All the better! Suppose they get together? Why can't it be? Why is he stayin' here anyhow—workin' for you? You say he don't like you—you took his girl—you say he's proud as hell. Why does he come back to ask for a job?"

"I've been considering all that, Brick." Selkirk's suave voice came out. "But what could I do? I couldn't refuse him a job—" the suave voice suddenly took on a note as tense and vicious as Cameron's—"you fool—what did I send him up in the hills with you for? Accidents happen in the woods, don't they? What's the matter with you? Do I have to tell you in plain words when I want a man disposed of? Use your—"

Margie, her eyes flashing again, knocked sharply, and immediately walked in when Cameron jerked the door open.

"Miss Hemingway!" ejaculated George Selkirk surprised. He rose from behind the office desk. Cameron, one hand on the knob of the opened door, surveyed the girl with the cruel, steady stare that had awed many men.

"Cameron and I were having a business talk," Miss Hemingway, smiled Selkirk, his poise recovered. "But no business I can have is as important as your presence, of course. Won't you sit down?"

"No, thanks. Sorry I interrupted your *business*. I was told I'd find you here. Also, I heard a few words before entering. I couldn't help it. So even murder is included in your accomplishments?"

"Murder is a nasty word, Miss Hemingway," replied Selkirk, his lips paling. "Don't use it too often!"

"Where do you think you are?" the girl scorned. "Out on the Spanish Main, in the

days of Morgan? Are you threatening me?"

"Not at all. Merely protesting against a preposterous charge. You misunderstood my meaning. I was telling Cameron—"

"I heard what you were telling Cameron! To dispose of someone!" She paused, shrugged with distaste. "But I am not here on police duty, or to instill honor among thieves. I am here on my own account, Mr. Selkirk—you have gone too far. I am going to have Federal agents in Cup Valley, to investigate why fires break out so persistently on our land, and why the few boys I've had who were intelligent and courageous enough to ask questions vanished after certain trips to town. And these Federal agents, Mr. Selkirk, won't be men the Hercules can buy. In other and briefer words, Mr. Selkirk, I'm going to send you to jail!"

Selkirk sneered.

"It'll take many Hemingways to do that, my dear young lady—many. Courts want proofs, and what proofs could you bring to back up such ridiculous charges?" He sat again, drew a silver plated cigaret case from his pocket, and relaxed as he lighted up, watching her narrowly thru the bluish film of smoke. Cameron slowly closed the door, and stood with his back to the knob.

Cameron would have been entirely at home on the Spanish Main in the days of Morgan. The realization came to Margie Hemingway as she heard the door click shut, and turning, gazed full into those cruel, steady eyes.

"Proofs?" she recovered herself, forced down the sudden grip of alarm. "The proofs will be forthcoming! Your men were seen last night, for one thing. Recognized as they fled after starting that blaze on the hill. And the fire was put out so quickly it had no time to burn the leather kerosene container and the rags."

"Recognized, eh?" Selkirk's sneer was growing. "Who recognized 'em? Easy, Cameron!" he warned, and Margie shrank

away from the approaching crew boss. The alarm in her peaked sharply upward—evolved its own defense.

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Cameron!" she bluffed magnificently. "I left word at home that if I was delayed Selkirk alone could be held responsible. If you as much as touch me you'll be in jail before night! There's such a thing as going too far!"

"Easy Cameron!" repeated Selkirk, and he was smiling again. "Don't let a woman upset you like that. You know, as well as I, that here charges are ridiculous. But it's hardly proper to lose our temper over it. Is that all you have come to say, Miss Hemingway?"

"Not quite. I also want to tell you, that, pending this Federal investigation, the Hemingway boys are going to defend their company. Any of your hired scum that crosses the ridge will be shot!"

"Breaking the laws yourself, Miss Hemingway?"

"Perhaps. You are warned, Mr. Selkirk. And my conscience is clear. Can I go?"

"Certainly, certainly!" Selkirk arose—waved a well kept hand, gracefully holding the cigaret between thumb and forefinger. "Open the door for the lady, Cameron. Good day, Miss Hemingway—drop in on us again sometime."

SEATED again, he listened to Cameron's angry tirade, unmoved.

"Brick—you're pretty simple—excuse my telling you. How can she get us arrested? She can't even procure a warrant in this town—and Federal investigation—do you know anything about law? Any lawyer can prove that the Hemingway company, losing, is trying to tie legal hobbles on its winning rival. Who saw you last night? Some one of her loggers. Can't you imagine what a good lawyer can do to one of those hill billies in a witness chair? And how about *our* proofs—proofs that can be manufactured and bought by the dozen? How many times must I tell

you that one of the biggest fortunes in Wall St. is directly back of the Hercules? If I wire the Big Boss someone is trying to blacken the reputation of the company, he'll throw his influence into the court squabble, and a hundred million dollars in an *influence*! If you don't believe it, try to buck one of those fellows—they've got power, Brick—power! And we're using it, understand?"

"Well—" Cameron subsided. "I'm admittin' there's money in this graft—"

"Yes. And the big scoop is yet to come. Hemingway will have to sell. His logging methods are antiquated, anyway, and don't forget that contract expiring next week—the contract of permission to use the sluice across Slash Canyon given him by the old directing board. I'm going to cut that deal right off, and Hemingway himself has given me the reason. Can't you see how pretty this game is working, Spike? It's open war between us now—and war means the end of the Hemingway Company. Old Pop will have to haul his logs around Slash Canyon, by team—no truck can navigate that woods road—hailed by teams from the yards—why—he'll never deliver his foot quota by spring. And if he doesn't he loses out on his last big market. He'll sell before that, of course. He's merely stubborn, not crazy."

"He'll sell for so much, and you drag so much more out of the Big Boss. Pretty good. But—does the Big Boy trust you enough to make it safe?"

"Trust me?" Selkirk laughed. "Brick—haven't you realized yet what was on the other end of little Georgie's double life in the big pond? The Big Boss, Cameron, is *my* uncle, too, and this game is child's play." He suddenly leaned forward, his face working. "Child's play—understand? Stick with me, Brick—and you'll edge into a graft so big it'll freeze you!"

Cameron started slightly. His cruel, steady gaze held tinges of admiration.

"Be the Big Boss yourself, some day,

eh?" he muttered, then smiled thinly. "I see why an accident's *gotta* happen in the woods. Don't worry!" he sneered—"it's a job I *like*! He'll never bust your play!"

"Good!" Selkirk relaxed. "See that he doesn't. Oh!" he added. "While you're at it, Brick, push the whole thing. Tell the boys the Hemingways shot at you, and go over for a good cleanup. If the law's to be called in, we might as well give it something to thresh over. Break up Hemingway's outfit—and, while doing it, perhaps the accident can happen, caused by a Hemingway. Understand? When the court hears of his fight with Big Jan, everything will be cleared, see?"

Cameron nodded, and the admiration grew in his eyes.

"I see. I'll cook his goose, but Hemingway'll be the chef in court, eh? Selkirk," he complimented—"you got a damned good head!"

The man behind the desk blew smoke complacently thru his nostrils.

"Brains run the world, Brick. Get busy!"

CHAPTER V.

DOLLY and Skeets finished the rhythmic, synchronized tap of their last appearance of the evening amid the clatter of the usual applause from the dining tables. The final bow taken, and back in the shelter of the dress hall, Skeets delivered his orders. Dolly, who longed to be called Mary Eardle, a pretty, soft-eyed thing of appealing ways, listened with rapt gaze on Skeets' expressive face.

"And you're to lay off him, savvy? Bill and me's going to finish this without your help. Give him the gate, for keeps!"

She played with the buttons on his loose, silk shirt.

"Gee—Skeets—you look fierce! Of course I'll ditch him. I went with him only to help you. Think I care anything about

a man like that? He's dumb—and besides, he drinks—"

Skeets grimaced.

"Fellows that drink ain't much good, kid," he approved with deep conviction. "Sorry I made you mix with him. But it's all over, understand? You'll walk out with me tonight, and I'll wait while you tell him—"

"What'll I tell him, Skeets—that me and you—"

"Me and you what?"

Dolly looked frightened, and very pretty. Skeets fought for his slipping freedom, and lost.

"Yeah—go ahead—tell him that me and you—well, tell him. I'll back you up."

Beside the restaurant curb was parked a long, low, rakish roadster. The weazened individual at the wheel stirred to attention as Skeets and Dolly came out of the side door—pressed the horn to soft, confident squawk.

"All right, Dolly!" he called, pushing open the lowcut door to his right. "Jump in."

Dolly went over, hesitated a moment, then excused herself.

"I'm sorry, Kiki—but—but Skeets there—my dance partner—well—we're engaged now," she dared.

"Engaged?" Kiki snapped the word—his small, venomous features all wrinkled in scowl. "Say—what kinda stall you givin' me? Only last night—"

"Come on, Mary," Skeets called coldly. "I can't wait all night!"

Mary, her face glowing with emotion, turned at once, and placed her hand in the crook of Skeets' well tailored arm. Together, stepping lightly, they went down the sidewalk. George Selkirk's chauffeur started after them, and gradually his thoughts shaped to fit the small face.

"An' she playin' the goody act—an' me fallin' for it!" he sneered. "Wotta sap I turned out to be! Maybe!" he amended, the sneer growing. "I ain't done wit' you

yet, Doll. Nor wit' Mr. Skeets. I'm goin' to see Mr. Skeets tonight—soon's I park this boat. To hell with Selkirk an' Rolli! My business first—the gang racket after." With a muttered curse he pressed the starter, and fed gas in sharp, angry spurts to the motor, his gaze still trying to pick out the forms of Skeets and Dolly. "Yes—Mr. Skeets—I'm seein' you tonight. I'll serve you notice the engagement is over." Chuckling evilly he depressed the clutch, shifted, and eased the long low roadster slowly down the street.

TWO hours later Skeets, responding to a knock on the door of his hotel room, quickly lost his drowsiness at sight of the entrant. Kiki closed the door with his left hand. His right was in the side pocket of a serge coat, and the thin woolen showed plainly the ugly butt of an automatic.

"You're sittin' still, if you're wise, Mr. Skeets!" sneered the rod man. "I ain't ever missed—shootin' from pocket."

"No?" asked Skeets with deep interest, his eyes narrow. "And what do you want to shoot me for?"

"What's the big idea of rushin' Dolly? The kid's my moll—an' you know it—you damn—"

Skeets' cold gaze rested on that concealed, arresting muzzle.

"How's that?" he sparred for time to think.

"Never mind stallin'!" rasped the voice. "An' don't talk too much. Lissen! I'm puttin' you wise, the kid's mine—an' tellin' you to lay off! There'll be no second time, see? What's your game in this town I don't know—you an' that big gorilla pal of yours started out one way an' finished another—but you'll steer clear of that kid—what-ever racket you're in. Get it?"

"I get it," said Skeets calmly?"

"Maybe I'll have to burn you anyway," the man at the door remarked in matter of fact manner. "Rolli just called up when I was downtown changin' my clothes—"

says Selkirk got things to tell me about you an' that Sadler guy—to go see him right away. But that's gang racket, see? I had my own business to settle with you—first."

"Thanks," said Skeets, measuring distances.

"An' I'm settlin' it. You layin' off Dolly?"

Skeets had been taking off his shoes preparatory to retiring, and one lay within reach of the swift dip of hand he made. The follow up of his throwing motion carried him over the back of the divan he had been sitting on during the terse exchange. Kiki's bullets ripped wickedly into that same divan back. But an automatic in a coat pocket, while very effective for one shot at a fixed target, has its disadvantages when directed to targets that move as fast as Skeets Donnelly moved in the next ten seconds.

One bullet did crease him, barely—a quick, harmless tug at his side, before he traversed the distance. Then the automatic ceased spitting with abrupt suddenness. Even one hundred and forty pounds, when all concentrated behind a firm fist, can do considerable damage, and Kiki Duly was a very small man.

He was only beginning to stir when alarmed guests, bell boys and the manager and house detective crowded the doorway. In the interval Skeets had been busy, and the result of his activities, scrawled on a sheet of letter paper, passed quickly into the house detective's hand. Aloud Skeets made statements that puzzled Kiki's blurred senses.

"It's all right! Perfectly all right. Friend of mine, a little drunk—came in to tell me his troubles. Took out a gun and began shooting, showing how he would kill the man who stole his girl. Fired into the floor—but I was afraid he might hit me by mistake, so I jumped him. It's all right, Mr. Carthright. Tell the bell hops to quiet the guests. Hush it up. I don't want my

friend troubled at all. He's a little drunk, that's all. I'll take care of him." An energetic, meaning wink repeated itself along with the words.

The manager gasped, looked at the house detective, who had performed a creditable act of reading and semi-comprehension.

"Janvers—"

Janvers acted.

"Just a false alarm!" he said as loudly as Skeets. "Back up, boys—back up. Nothing—nothing at all." He frowned as he spoke, made significant motions with his hands. The manager caught some inkling of the situation, and gave orders that cleared the room of the pressing, curious crowd. Skeets had knelt, presumably to pass a handkerchief over Kiki's brow, as became a worried friend, and his body was between Kiki's roving gaze and view of the house detective's actions. Glancing once more at the crumpled paper in his hands to make sure, Janvers set about obeying its instructions.

The door closed—the bustle of noise beyond it died away down the corridor. A very puzzled Kiki rolled himself over, came to his feet—to survey the muzzle of his own pistol and a perfectly fiendish face.

THE transformation was startling. Skeets Donnelly's talent had held theatre crowds immobile for hours by its vivid portrayals of emotion—and that in places where entertainment was paid for and judged as entertainment. In that small room, behind an automatic loaded with the real thing in cartridges, Skeets' distorted features and dilated eyes put their message across so unmistakably that Kiki shrank back.

"What in hell—?" he snarled his amazement.

"You'll find out what's in hell!" gritted the man behind the pistol. "I'm going to send you there!"

"Say!" Kiki's small face was a pasty

white. "What's the game, anyway—?"

"Wondering why I didn't turn you over to the cops, eh? Wondering why I passed you off as a friend of mine, eh? You know why? Because Gentleman Danny Rocks settles his own business, see—?"

"*Danny Rocks?*" Kiki's eyes showed circles of white around the pupils. "Cripes—you ain't Danny Rocks, brother?"

"No-o? You'll find out if I ain't! So you cheap shaves thought yours was the only racket in this hick burg?" The twisted face twisted further, in a sneering smile. "You guys ought to be playing marbles. Listen!" he snapped. "You got one chance for your skin—come across—clean. Just what's the graft around here? Timber's a new deal with me—we don't have it in the Loop. But Danny Rocks'll try anything once. Who's heading your mob—Rolli's old boss Deroux? I thought he was dead?"

"He is dead," muttered Kiki, still pale. "Rolli an' me's tied in a new game. There's nothing in it for you, Rocks," he began to argue.

"Why not?" snapped Danny Rocks. "You fellers are working it, ain't you? Why can't I get a slice? There's no why—little boy. And if your gang holds out—it'll be just too bad, that's all—just too bad. Do you know how many rods I can bring out here in about two days? Plenty—little boy—plenty. Let me put you wise to a deal—me and Big Tim Hoosia's got an agreement to join up in any mob war. If you're one of Deroux's old gang—you know what that means. Big Tim's bigger in Chicago than he ever was in New York—"

"Yeah, but lissen, Rocks—"

"Let me finish!" Rocks cut him off with the cold voice of authority. "I want you to get me straight. I'm up here because I'm here. That's all—see? But being here—I get wise to a racket I didn't know about—looks like a squeeze on old Hemingway. There must be jack in it—or Rolli and you wouldn't be hanging around.

Who's paying you two, and that gorilla Cameron, your usual price? You know what I'll do if you don't tell me? I'll squeeze this li'l trigger. And I'll get away with it, see? The story'll hold water. You're drunk—get me? You start shooting again—like you did the first time. I jump you again, and in the mixup the gun twists around—"

"Aw, lay off that stuff!" finally protested Kiki. "I know you got the goods on me now, Rocks. Besides—I don't want to buck you. Tellin' the truth—me an' Rolli was about to head for Chi an' try to crash your mob, when this timber deal came up. I didn't know you was Danny Rocks, or else—hell—what's a moll? The world's full of 'em."

"You betcha. Women, little boy—are small spashes in a good man's pond. Remember that it was Danny Rocks told you that. Now—talk business. What's the game? Why can't I slice in on it? Better—why can't you and Rolli tie up with me right now, and work the squeeze for *me*?"

"Can't be done, Rocks. We're not workin' for a mob head now. Selkirk's runnin' this racket—a high hat crook—see? There's a lotta mixups I don't understand—the squeeze ain't on Hemingway direct—it's on the Big Noise behind Selkirk. I don't know how much—Rolli an' me an' Cameron get paid to cut off loose ends, but what's in the middle of the tangle is hard to get at."

"I see!" grunted Danny Rocks. "It's Selkirk I gotta speak to. And I'm a good speaker, brother—so good that maybe I'll be giving you boys the orders pretty soon. But I'm saying the whole thing is queer—even your job. Loose ends? Where's there a loose end in this Rip Van Winkle burg?"

"Plenty, Rocks, plenty," Kiki said out of a crooked mouth corner. "Me an' Rolli's taken three for a ride in the last month—three of Hemingway's woodjacks. They've never been found 'cause it's a great country for droppin' stiffs off the road—they

fall far enough to be out of the news for keeps. An' I don't mind tellin' you it's lucky for that gorilla of yours me an' you had this break. I ain't sure—but I think Selkirk was goin' to list him—"

"Who—Sesta?"

"Sesta, or Sadler. Selkirk knows him—must be another high boy in our business, eh?" Kiki squinted half defferentially. "Rocks—most of us always wonder how you fine fingers work it. An eddication is worth the trouble, I guess—"

"Sure is," said Danny Rocks. "But you was saying Selkirk was going to list Sadler? What for?"

"I dunno. Just an idea I got—from some things. An' how about that phone call I told yuh about—Rolli's got some-thin' to tell me about you an' Sadler—prob'bly Selkirk's wise to you fellers, an' wants yuh taken for a ride. Guess he don't know you're Danny Rocks, tho. Wait'll Rolli hears it!"

"Suppose you call Rolli up?" suggested Danny Rocks. "I want to hear what he's got to say about me and Sadler. Wait—I want to slip my shoes on. Be careful!"

Together they walked to the regulation two piece set. And once the number was called, Kiki stared.

"Give me the receiver!" repeated Danny Rocks coldly. "Come on!" The ugly, dull blue automatic gaped at Kiki. "You do what I tell you, and make no breaks, or I'll burn you, and quick! Talk to Rolli—repeating what I say. After you're thru talking, cover up that phone mouth—*tight*. Don't try to fool me—I can tell if your hand'll be pressing or not—" the tiny circuit clacks of the receiver stopped the hurried words.

"Hello!" a voice came over the wire.

The man with the gun dipped the ear piece to his side, and pressed it hard against his own body with a firm left hand.

"Say—'hello, Rolli—that you?'"

Kiki did, and half sullenly covered the transmitter with his palm as the auto-

matic jerked significantly. The ear piece, brought up to Danny Rock's temple once more, sounded. "Yeah—that's me. Who's talkin'—Kiki?"

The receiver went down to its muffling again.

"Say—'yeah—it's Kiki—I can't be down tonight—never mind why—what was that about Donelli an' Sadler? *Say it!*"

Kiki said it, dull suspicions beginning to stir in his mind. Silence, a deep, queer silence, blanketed the room as Danny Rocks listened to Rolli's reply. A long reply it was, or so it seemed to Kiki, as he gazed alternately from the muzzle of his own automatic to the keen, hard face of the man who held it. Evidently what Rolli was saying touched Danny Rocks, notorious Chicago racketeer, for his eyes widened, then narrowed again, and fastened on Kiki with a look of cold anger. He suddenly covered the receiver and snapped "Say—'Hell—is that so? The big Squeeze's son, eh? You sure?' *Say it!*"

Kiki said it, his suspicions growing. The man who claimed to be Danny Rocks listened again, for long, dragging minutes. Kiki could hear Rolli's voice, in faint squawks sounding in the receiver. At last the loose part of the phone dipped again to its holder's side. Kiki's lightly held palm pressed the transmitter mouth at the automatic's jerk.

"Say—'Sure I'll come over. I didn't figure on things like that. Be right over. Good bye.'"

The receiver went briefly back to catch Rolli's reply, then was set on the contact fork by a reach of its holder's arm.

"That's all," he remarked calmly. "All right, Janvers—you can come out now."

KIKI'S suspicions twisted into visible expression on his face as a man crawled out from beneath the bed.

"Frameup, eh?" he snarled, comprehending.

The features of Danny Rocks seemed to

relax—change astonishingly, and Skeets Donnelly came thru the clearing mask.

"You heard, Janvers?"

"Every word, sir," said the somewhat excited house detective, wondering if Nick Carter had come to Cuphandle City. "It was wonderful acting, sir."

"You're right," replied Skeets. "Good acting. But now there's a real act ahead of us. Got handcuffs? Good! Put 'em on that rat."

"You damn doublecrossin'—" Kiki mouthed impotently. "Danny Rocks! You ain't ever seen Danny Rocks! Where'd you get all that mob dope?"

"That's telling," smiled Skeets. "Haven't got time, Janvers," he replied to the same question from the puzzled detective. "I need help—and at once. 'We'll get this fellow to the station, and send men after a few others.'"

Kiki laughed, a cracked, contemptuous laugh.

"Try an' do it! On what charge? Who are you, anyway?"

The question halted Skeets. Visions of red tape caused him to frown.

"Listen—Janvers—you heard enough in here to know that I'm bucking a crooked game. Will you go a point past the law to help the law? I haven't got much time. There's a man—the whitest man I ever knew—in danger of being killed any minute, up in the lumber camps, past the ridge. I've got to go there—and I want some of this rat's mates arrested while I'm gone. The Hercules A. C. bunch—"

"We can speak to the chief—" began Janvers.

"Oh, forget the chief!" said Skeets unpolitely. "Just call up the patrol, and run them in. Say the Savoy's making the charge—say they broke in and robbed the office—say anything, but hold them. There's a fellow called Rolli, and two others—hold them—"

"If we had some authority—"

"All right then, we'll find authority!"

promised Skeets desperately, his thoughts going to Bill Sadler, about to be shot because he was the Big Squeeze's son. "Come on! You!" he questioned Kiki as they began to drag the gangster out. "Who's the Big Squeeze? Where does he live?"

"Go to hell!" was the considerate answer. "He lives where you won't find him in a hurry, you meddlin' sap! An' what's goin' to happen to *you*, soon, is plenty. Remember that when you're tryin' to put the cops on Selkirk." He suddenly laughed, surging back in the doorway, to leer into Skeets' face. "Tryin' to put the cops on Selkirk! Ha—ha!"

CHAPTER VI

BUT Skeets did put the cops on Selkirk. The lobby was deserted, as they passed thru it, save for the sleepy desk clerk who lost his drowsiness as the three went by him on the way out. Skeets called a taxi and ten minutes later was explaining things to the chief of Cuphandle City's police department, a thick-set man with eyes a bit too close together, and a bearded upper lip.

"You say the timberjacks are going to mix it tonight? What can I do? It'll take the U. S. Marines to stop those crews—besides, Mr. Donnelly—it's out of my jurisdiction—"

"But the town end of this crooked business, chief!" protested Skeets hotly. "Here's the Savoy's house detective—witness to this rodman's statements that he and Rolli have taken three men for rides—"

"I'll hold him—you can charge him with the break into your room," replied the chief evasively. "But the other fellows—we'll examine this man—"

"You'll arrest the three up in the Hercules club room now, and arrange to have George Selkirk arrested in Baywood. That's what you'll do! And I'll see that you do it! What do you think—you can

get away with a thing as raw as this? Go ahead and lock me up. There's others waiting for a move like that!" Skeets lied with confident impressiveness.

The heavy set chief glanced quickly toward a side desk, where two very honest and very interested captains were taking in every word. That very afternoon he had been called to account by the Hemingways. Here was another, threatening complications. Forced to the wall by the determination of the slim man facing him, he discarded a means of extra income, and grew official at once.

"Don't worry, Mr. Donnelly—this department doesn't go to sleep while crooks are in the city. But in the city, remember! Brown!" he called. "Send the wagon out for this man Rolli and the two with him." He frowned a bit in thought. "Up in the camp, now—that's miles away, and the lumberjacks fight a good deal anyway—hey—where are you going?"

"To do what you won't!" replied Skeets grimly. Without further words he ran out of the station, his spirits weighed by the knowledge that Rolli had talked of things due to transpire before midnight, and it could scarcely be short of eleven now. Skeets swore frankly at his imagination, which drew a picture of his friend crumpling down in the confusion of a free for all mixup—shot in the back as he tried to reason with the mob of elemental, fighting roughnecks who worked the timber of the Assai slopes.

He ran down the almost deserted street, but soon slowed, berating himself for a fool. How to get out of the valley, and up to the lumber camp? Bill had given directions in case of need, but directions were complicated. And again—could he hire a taxi to take a run up the tire shredding wood roads at that time of night? A motorcycle? Plans formed and passed from Skeets' mind as hurriedly as they formed. He still had the automatic he had taken from Kiki, with perhaps three shells in the

clip—Skeets started, and forgot his anxious dilemma for a moment.

He had been continuing downtown at a swift walk, noting even thru his cogitations the passing of the patrol wagon on its way to round up Rolli and the two gun men waiting for Kiki in the Hercules club office. About to break into a run again, toward a taxi stand he remembered as being located a few blocks down, Skeets started, and veered into the shadows close to the high brick building he was that moment passing.

The Hercules Hotel it was, and sliding silently by Skeets, easing to noiseless stop at the curb, was a big, bluish sedan. But Skeets did not at once notice the luxurious vehicle. For the man coming down the hotel stairs was Selkirk. Rolli had said Selkirk was gone to Baywood, to assure a perfect alibi. There had evidently been some changes in the plans of the gang. Skeets almost started after Selkirk, but a feminine voice, calling "George!" in surprise, arrested him, swung his attention to the big, closed car by the curb.

"George!" the voice called again. "Here—it's Esther!"

GEORGE'S surprise was genuine, and mixed with other emotions. The watching Skeets saw a quick change come over Selkirk—the slight swagger of self complacency passed from the man, changed to courteous deference as he stepped toward the long blue automobile, from the open doors of which issued the possessor of the girlish voice, an older woman, and an imposingly built, elderly man. Skeets suddenly started.

"Shall I wait, Mr. Sadler?" the car's driver was asking.

"Uncle Frank!" Selkirk's voice chimed in. "Why—what a surprise! And you, Esther! How do you do, Mrs. Lyder?" He laughed, not quite naturally. "Why—I thought you were all back home—packing up for Palm Beach, perhaps—"

"We came west instead, George," answered the big, imposing man. "Plane and train—bought this car in Frisco. I came out to find Bill, and Esther and her mother availed themselves of the opportunity for company. Wanted to surprise you."

"Bill?" Selkirk's voice was strained.

"Yes, Bill. Detectives traced him as far as Marino county, here in California. George, my boy, there has been a terrible mistake. Bill wasn't in that night club at all—and I've found out things since, that cause me to remember our parting with shame. I've got—"

"Mr. Sadler," said Selkirk hurriedly. "Let's go back in, and talk this all over. I have a rather important engagement, but they can wait," he dismissed vaguely, "till you are all comfortably housed. Come in—Esther—Mrs. Lyder—"

Skeets stared at the hotel front after the four had passed within.

"Esther—Mrs. Lyder!" he mimicked in a low tone. "George—you'd make a good actor. And can you beat it? Mr. Sadler—looking for Bill. The Big Squeeze!" He started, many stray runs of thought fusing in his mind. "Suffering Midas—Bill's story is taking shape! But how about Bill himself?"

Bill himself might well be killed at any moment. The thought fretted Skeets, yet he made no move to leave the corner of the hotel. The big blue car still waited at the curb, and its presence pressed home a plan of action to Skeets' mind. It was the only way. His decision finally made, he ran forward, gained the stairs, and hurried within the hotel entrance.

"Could you show me at once to Mr. Sadler's room?" he asked of a clerk whose flustered expression was evidence of the stir caused by the Big Squeeze's presence.

"Mr. Sadler, sir, has just gone up—I doubt if he'll see—"

"He'll see *me*!" stated Skeets convincingly. "What's the number of his room?"

"I'd better call up, sir—"

"Look here!" frowned Skeets. "Do you want a good bawling out? I asked for the number of *Mr. Sadler's room*!"

"127—second floor, left section, right hand side," hurriedly complied the clerk, wondering which one of his many superiors he had affronted now. "Elevator's waiting, sir. Any luggage to check?"

"No," replied Skeets over his shoulder. He gave directions to the elevator boy, and five minutes later was paused before the door marked 127.

Selkirk's voice, a little strained, came audibly thru the thin panels.

"But Esther—surely a matter like this can't alter your feelings. Then it wasn't love—"

"I always loved Bill," informed Esther's well modulated voice. "I promised to marry you out of spite."

"Now—now—this is a mixup." This from a heavy, authoritative voice. Skeets waited to hear no more. He turned the knob, and pushed thru, Kiki's automatic in his right hand.

"Mixup is right, Mr. Sadler!" he informed the stunned occupants of the room. "Now—listen—all of you—while I untangle it. Especially you, George—don't move!"

Half an hour later George Selkirk passed the desk clerk on his way out. His face was pale, drawn—the usual self complacency in his eyes a vanished thing. Directly behind him marched Skeets, the automatic snugly fitted in his coat pocket, and beside Skeets walked Frank R. Sadler, director of big enterprises—handler of millions—his hard, powerful features set in grim purpose. The clerk stared after the three, sensing something very wrong among the high officials of the Hercules concern. Selkirk's face, as he passed, had a look that persisted in memory.

Outside, Selkirk was first to enter the big, waiting car, taking the seat beside the driver. His thoughts, hurried, almost frantic, moiled ceaselessly, and came back to

one conclusion. The police would get him if he broke for it in town, even if the man good enough to take an automatic from Kiki failed to effectively use it. He had trapped himself by his lack of control—of presence of mind. Yet once up in the hills—on the dark, winding woods road—he sneered slightly, voiced a hoarse—"Go straight out along this street—I'll tell you when to turn."

"George—" Frank Sadler's deep voice rose above the motor's purr. "I hope this is somehow a mistake. Had you acted naturally I would never have believed. But your flat refusal to go up to the camp—your entire reaction—"

"I was amazed, Uncle Frank," replied Selkirk, his tone calm and suave once more. "And hurt. Hurt to think that you—you who have been as a father to me, should believe this wildly foolish story. That man, I tell you is crazy. I haven't seen Bill since that day in Long Island. I don't know what has become of him."

The big, powerful car was lifting and dropping on cushioning springs, its fat tires squishing into the bumps of the road which joined the city asphalt on the outskirts of town. Frank Sadler frowned at the man beside him.

"I need not repeat, Mr. Donnelly, that it will go hard with you if this man you speak of is not my nephew—"

"Wait and see—wait and see!" replied Skeets calmly. "No use arguing. I'm telling you that Selkirk here is a crook, and planning to kill your nephew Bill. Bill's probably in a mixup right now, up in the hills. Driver—step on it, will you?"

Selkirk relaxed against the cushions as the big car roared to sudden acceleration, its headlights spraying the dusty, white road. He lit a cigaret, puffed calmly.

"Uncle Frank—can't you see the man is lying? You know how Bill was—"

"That's a lie!" said Frank Sadler, and Skeets caught a note of pride in the deep voice.

"I thought he wasn't to be trusted largely because I believed everything you said, George. But I've found out differently. The money he made fighting he was putting away—you told me he was spending it around all night restaurants. I know why he didn't come back at me for my calling him down. The kid was proud—too damned proud to say his say—even on the day I sent him from home. About this man being Bill—we'll see soon enough. Why are you so set against going to the camp?"

"The delay, that's all—the uselessness of it. But, just as you say, we'll see!" Selkirk withheld further words—watched the winding road.

THE road from Cuphandle City to the hills was more than a road for cars, towards the end—it was an adventure. Untarred, dusty and pitted, it wound snake like but fairly passable into and over the first buckle of hill, it split, forked, divided into numerous side drives to homestead slots—private hunting lodges—a village or two. And beyond, up the long sweep of the mountain flanks, its narrow, rutted, patched up course was absolutely hostile to gasoline powered vehicles. At night, in the weird half blackness, half palely lit alternation of the moonflooded slope, driving a car along it was a foolhardy venture.

The big, blue sedan labored nobly, its eight cylinders roaring in breakless unison, buckling it up the torturous ascent thru the power of a lowered transmission. Leaned forward over the wheel the driver peered into the headlight glow. The twin, focused beam alternately showed trees, the gouged roadbed, rocks, as the course twisted and turned in its efforts to ease the grade. Skeets' impatience had grown with the passing of every minute, and it was communicating itself to Frank Sadler. They were well up in the hills—it lacked now but ten minutes to midnight—what was happening in the Hemingway camp?

"What's that, shots?" he asked once. anxiously—then—"say—you sure the last turn was right?" addressing Selkirk, as he strove to remember Bill's directions.

"Of course—you don't think I'd lead you wrong?" The irony in Selkirk's voice was lost in the rising roar of a laboring motor. The spinning wheels slipped in water puddles, caught, slipped again, and the roar sharply accelerated as the transmission was lowered again. As the big car inched up the sharp incline the driver shook an anxious head.

"Jiminy Crickets—what a road! It'll drop past the top, sure—worse'n a roller coaster."

Selkirk smiled coldly. His right hand, that had been resting on the lowered door window presumably to let the cigaret it held smoke outside, now slipped to the handle, turned it in one quick, firm motion. His right foot pressed outward, holding the catch out, and the hand went back to the window base, pressing in to prevent any swaying. Calmly in perfect control of himself, he waited.

The car gained the rise top, levelled, its headlights spraying empty space.

"Told you!" muttered the driver, his foot squeezing the service break. "Up and—"

"Down!" snarled Selkirk, his prearranged moves sharp and sure. Just two quick motions—one with his left hand, that in passing to a grip on the further side of the wheel, threw the hand throttle wide open, and the wheel, grasped for one quick sidewise spin, was instantly released as his second move catapulted him out of the opening side door.

The driver reversed that quick curve of wheel, kicked out the clutch at once, but the car's leap had carried the left front wheel over the edge of the roadside. His horrified gaze saw a black chasm—ghostly branches of trees in moonlight, lift toward him as the heavy car toppled. Skeets' automatic cracked harmlessly once, then the

big blue sedan, its heavy engine dipping down the washout, turned completely over, crashed into the fringe of bay trees standing ghostly in the moonlight.

Back on the road George Selkirk laughed, laughed aloud, tho there was little enjoyment in the sound. From further up in the hills small, pop-like reports told of Cameron's activity. Selkirk's laugh expressed his feelings. At least, robbed of his spoils, he would have some revenge—would take some satisfying memories with him in his flight.

CHAPTER VII

BILL SADLER, leaving Skeets in the Savoy, wandered about Cuphandle City, frankly at peace with himself tho not with the world. This feeling of content puzzled even his own appraisals, for he had no reasons to be content. But somehow the sunlight, the snap in the autumn air, made William Sadler feel very young and very optimistic about entirely unfavorable things.

"*What does it matter, dear, if the sun don't shine, long as you are mine—*" he whistled, crossing the street toward the livery stables where he had left the horse and buggy that had taken Cameron and himself down from the hills. Cameron's orders were to have the rig waiting outside the Hercules club by two o'clock. Cameron was a very bossy man.

"*Long as you are mine—what does it matter?*" his whistling repeated as he drove the sorrel mare down the street a few moments later. He changed the whistle to a confidential monologue.

"Between you and me, Horse, I'd like to tap him. But what would you? Aren't playing a deep, dark game—whoa! Rest a bit—Shades of Aphrodite!" he trailed off, flushing, as he stared at the girl issuing from the narrow doorway of the Hercules A. C.

Margie Hemingway was crying. Her

eyes were all a-brim with tears—and to William Sadler they appeared glorious—the tremble of her lips seemed to lift him from the buggy seat.

“Miss Hemingway—”

“You—*again*? Oh!” There was more emotion in that short sound, uttered as she turned away, than William Sadler had ever heard in the lengthiest recitals of troubles. He sensed the snapping of the girl’s will—her inability to carry on. Impulse moved William Sadler. He grasped her arm.

“Margie—what have those rats been saying to you?”

The hard almost angry snap of his words shocked the girl. She looked up—saw things in the grey, clear eyes. Slowly the import of what he had said percolated to her mind—and it brought into birth a curious conjecture.

“Mr. Sesta,” she asked abruptly. “Tell me one thing—Was it your girl George Selkirk stole?”

The grey eyes clouded, grew hard.

“No. Nobody steals any girl of mine. George Selkirk *thinks* he stole a girl of mine, probably. But what—”

“Another thing, Mr. Sesta. Why couldn’t Selkirk refuse you a job? And why does he want you killed?”

William Sadler glanced up the side of the club building.

“So George wants me killed? That’s interesting news—Margie. Why’d he tell you this?”

“He didn’t,” the girl replied coldly. “I overheard Cameron talking about someone who disliked Selkirk because Selkirk had stolen his girl, some man who was proud, but who had come to ask for a job. I think they meant you. And, in payment for the unwanted interest you seem to have in me, I tell you not to stay with them any longer—because an accident is due to happen in the woods. Good day, Mr. Sesta.”

She turned away, but he was in step beside her.

“Margie—it’s not ‘good day’ yet.

There’s things I want to talk over with you—with you and your father.”

“My father is gone out of the valley. Had to—doctor’s advice. And I—Mr. Sesta—I have nothing against you—as a hired man no longer in favor with those I despise—but really—”

“Look here!” growled William Sadler. “Do I look like a hired crook?”

She half stopped, gazed at him, amazed. The curious glances of passersby—rested on the two, and one, acquainted with recent events, wondered at seeing Margie Hemingway with the Hercules fighter who had beaten Big Jan.

“You look like—I don’t know,” the girl trailed off doubtfully. Her doubts grew—

“Mr. Sesta—I’m troubled—”

“I’m here to rid you of your troubles,” answered William Sadler, and felt the words inspired. “I want to talk to you about your troubles. Not mine. I haven’t any,” he lied. “And another thing, before we talk, don’t call me Mr. Sesta. Don’t call me Mr. anything. Just Bill. Bill and Margie—two pals, working on one problem. See? Nothing out of the way.”

“Oh, it’s not that. I’m not *that* prudish. But Bill—I’ll frankly tell you I’m suspicious of nearly everyone lately. Of you very much so. Selkirk wants you killed—you talk like a gentleman—but I saw you fight like—like—”

“A beast. That’s all right,” he dismissed. “I could explain that, but what’s the use? What I want to talk to you about is a common purpose we have. Understand? George Selkirk and company are trying to rob your father and someone else—and I intend to block the game. That makes me your ally—and why should you bother about anything else? Come on!” he pressed, at her hesitation. “Turn into this place with me. We’ll talk about it over a cooling drink.”

H E TALKED so well that two hours later he was driving Margie Heming-

way up to her camp, seated beside her on a buggy identical to Cameron's, except that the horse between its shafts was black. And up in the mountain quiet, with the sun westerling slowly toward the levels below, Margie came more and more to believe a man's unsubstantiated statements. There was something about Bill Sadler that convinced, and he was very earnest that afternoon.

"But why?" she asked again. "Just why are you going to take this risk? Because of a girl?"

"Oh, bother girls!" said William Sadler, then caught himself. "No—I didn't mean that. Bother *that* girl. I'm doing this because—well—because. Reasons are unimportant things, anyhow. The main fact is that I'm going to do it. I want to look over the ground, get all evidence possible, then have you send a telegram to Frank Sadler, direct. It will bring action—"

"You know Frank Sadler, perhaps? One of his agents!" she guessed her blue eyes flashing.

"No. I am not connected in any way with Frank Sadler. I was—once. There's your reason, Margie. Loyalty is a strong instinct, you know. I was once concerned in Frank Sadler's affairs—happening to become involved in this mess—I want to straighten it. But without any identities mentioned. Understand? The noble act—you've read of 'em—just pass by, help the old boy out, and pass on, *incognito*. Sign the name Hemingway to the telegram."

She caught the current of emotion beneath his light tone, and regarded him curiously—her gaze dwelling on the full, brown throat exposed by the open collar of the rough shirt. It affected her strangely—his nearness affected her—conveyed a quieting assurance of the end of all her trouble.

"Oh, Bill!" she said impulsively. "If this is all true—think of what daddy and I will owe you! Why—the very world seems changed—all in a few hours. I

thought we were fighting the Hercules in self—Frank Sadler's millions—why, if we had known Selkirk was just a plain swindler—"

"I didn't know myself, Margie. His father's blood—I guess—Aw, let's talk of something else. How old are you? When do you intend to marry—and why—?"

"Watch that horse!" blushed Margie for no reason. "And don't ask such personal questions. Think of the danger you will be running into the next few days—"

"No danger, Margie. We're going to fool Cameron, aren't we? You give me Jan and a few of your best boys, and we'll wind up the ball tonight."

"He may suspect something—especially after your leaving that note on the buggy seat."

"I had to leave it. If I hadn't he would have suspected something anyway, and perhaps not come back to camp at all. And I want him up here, little girl, when we pull the roundup."

"But if something goes wrong?" persisted the girl. The very air of peace about, the stolidly climbing back horse, drowse of insects, seemed to warn of grim opposites lurking beyond the next rise of earth. "What if you don't overpower Cameron and those few you suspect, at once? They may—Bill—I heard them talking of killing you!"

Young Sadler laughed. It was a good world.

"Gedep, Anthanaseus!" he called cheerily. "Kill *me*? Impossible. The very fact Cameron is planning that, will make him unprepared for our move. His plans are laid for say, tomorrow or any day a good chance presents itself—we move tonight. Result—Cameron is blocked. Why—nothing to it!"

She glanced at him keenly once more. For all she read in the smiling face he might have been genuinely careless, or else admirably playing a part.

"Do you know the woods—Bill?"

"Not much—but I intend to. Look at that!"

His arm pointed to a white crowned peak, reflecting the glow of setting sun—a far, white hump above the many rolls of green slope that fell from it to the valley lands. Below them, to the left, the incline they were climbing dropped almost sharply away, down to the glint of quietly flowing water. Margie called the peak Mt. Pitch-off, and the flowing water Assai Creek, going to empty into Crystal Lake, the starting point of both Hemingway and Hercules log drives to the sawmills in the coast towns. It was a grand panorama of distance and quiet and serenity, seen from their position on the dusty ribbon of road that climbed the hills. But Margie could not grasp the serenity—her first glow of security was fading.

"I didn't mean it that way, Bill. Knowing the woods—do you know just what kind of—of men, are up here? Do you know what kind of man Cameron is?"

William Sadler fought himself, and veered the black away from the left edge of the road, which at top of an unusually steep incline dropped with treacherous suddenness. A recent heavy rain had washed out part of the roadbed, and the wobbly buggy wheels went by the danger point with but scant inches to spare.

"Whew!" whistled Margie's companion, glad of the distraction. "Wouldn't like to go by *that* in the dark! What did you say about the men up here?" he asked a moment later, his emotions controlled.

"They're—Bill—they're either very good or very bad. Some are terrible—human hawks! I've heard of men dying from—O, what's the use?" She tried to laugh. "I'm foolish, Bill. Of course there's no danger."

"Of course not!" dismissed Bill heartily. "Listen, and I'll tell how easily we'll fix Cameron, without trouble." He talked steadily, lightly.

"Well—if you're sure what you have

to say will convince the Hercules men—"

"Sure! Why—of course I'm sure! There's no danger at all." He looked up. "Well—here we are! Isn't that your bunkhouse, at base of that slope to the right?"

"That's it!" the girl replied cheerily. "Turn the horse right by the first big rock. Good!" she approved as he maneuvered the buggy by—"Now just sit here till I tell Jan and the boys you're a friend."

William Sadler looked after her, and the laughter went out of his eyes, left them steely hard. She was afraid for him. Curious, he thought, how a thing like that could affect a man. Afraid Cameron would kill him. Bill Sadler suddenly smiled, a tight and somewhat wicked smile. He had no love for Cameron, himself.

JAN and the boys welcomed him neither coldly nor effusively, outside the bunkhouse. They were plainly curious. Evidently the girl had succeeded in partially convincing them, but a certain wariness marked their approach. The low sun was still flooding the scene with its last red rays—bathing the bunkhouse, the meal shed beyond, further along, in a grove of high, straight pines, the half hidden outlines of the cabin used by Old Pop Hemingway when health permitted his supervising the timber cutting. Horses clanked haul chains in a rough half corral—several heavy teams were lined by the tool house—and from the combination supply store and kitchen rose a thin column of grey wood smoke, a writhing, pale snake outlined against the pines. William Sadler liked the scene, and the men who faced him—frankly questioning, but devoid of nervousness—calm, solid and strong as the hills.

At conclusion of his brief, terse talk it was Big Jan, his face still marked where a smashing glove had repeatedly battered, who was first of them all to walk forward. He shook the hand which had defeated him, without shame.

"Bill—anytime you say—Ay bane ready. You know me—Big Jan—fight pretty good—sometime—"

William Sadler hid the glint in his eyes. Margie was watching them closely.

"That 'a' boy, Jan!" Inwardly he said more complimentary things. The big Swede, huge, hulking, fearless, was worth many times his pay in times of trouble. Sadler thought of some great blinking bear, all surface harmlessness over a devastating strength. Big Jan was like that. And the others were to lesser-degree cast in the same mold. They grouped for a while without the bunkhouse, till the cook remembered his domestic duties and called them to supper.

The girl responded first, anxious to do something to relieve her helpless anxiety—and Sadler took advantage of her absence to say things much more pointed and understandable to the group around him—things that brought a low, concerted growl of approbation. But the new found friend of the Hemingways halted further remarks.

"We'll fix details out of camp, boys. No use worrying the kid. Come on, let's eat."

Margie ate with the men—plain beans and bread and ham, alleviated with touches of canned dainties saved for special occasions—ate by the side of William Sadler, and unexplainably, tears came from time to time into her eyes.

"I'm thinking of dad—" she replied to his questions. "How he always loved to eat here with his boys just as we are doing tonight—how he hated this trouble that was spoiling his old age—my father always wanted to come to some sort of settlement—but Selkirk's approaches were insults. We were blind not to see thru so thin a scheme."

"Everything looks thin after it's explained," philosophized William Sadler. "Well—boys—almost ready? It's a two hour tramp—just enough to digest these bracers you stowed away. Then the pic-

nic." He frowned meaningly to stop certain comments.

Margie followed them out. The sun had gone down, and dusk was a velvet blanket over the vast bowl side of the slopes. But she was close enough to Sadler to see the look in his eyes. His impulse was to say something serious.

"Bill!" she encouraged. "I'm worried. It seems all too sudden—too great a change. Can this be true—can this be the end of the Hercules-Hemingway war? You'll—you'll all be careful? Jan—where's Jan?"

Jan had gone to the bunkhouse. He issued a few moments later, and the girl's quick glance verified her suspicions.

"Jan—you've changed shoes?"

"Ay slip on log, last time ay go over by sluice," said Jan calmly.

"Never mind, Marg," reassured William Sadler, changing his impulse. "He won't use those caulks. Remember my plan for handling Cameron without trouble? There's really no danger."

He turned, and led the rough shirted, burly shouldered crew away into the gathering darkness. The girl and the cook looked after them, and, like an audible expression of the difference in life, the cook swore regretfully because he was chosen to stay behind, and the girl cried—thinking neither of herself nor the lumber war, but of a man whose eyes could not lie as easily as voice and expression.

CHAPTER VIII

SADLER'S acted cheerfulness passed from him at once when out of sight of the Hemingway camp houses.

"No, we'll leave the four on the ridge, guns and all," he answered a question. "Can't tell what may turn up. Come along! We've no time to lose."

They walked in silence after that, a grim and stalwart company, thru lanes of tall, still tree trunks that filtered the wan rays of a half moon hovering on the brow of

Mt. Pitchoff. Up a long slope they climbed, down to its base beyond the rise, up again, and over a level draggy with underbrush. Up again, for a long gruelling climb, to the left of them a yawning void spanned by the thread of a sluiceway once used by every logging concern past the thousand foot levels—soon to be exclusive Hercules property. Down again, and now they saw lights in the wooded, small valley below them—scattered lights—sounds. Cameron's camp.

"Crawl up close, and scatter," instructed William Sadler. "I'm going in alone and try to reason a win. Understand? If I can beat Cameron at talking, O. K. No use fighting most of those boys. They're square. But if I can't—if you hear me yell—come running."

"You just bet we come running!" replied Jan ponderously. "An' fightin', too! Eh, boys?"

The boys growled, a low, surly, deep sound, fitting that primitive scene—the dark huddle they made among the trees on the moonstreaked slope.

"O. K!" approved William Sadler, tightening his belt. "Spread out, and wait."

Brick Cameron ceased talking, and looked up at the opening of the bunkhouse door. A gasoline lantern hissed faintly, steadily, hung from a hook in the rough ceiling, its frame braces throwing shadows over empty cots—its light showing Cameron's quick scowl—the tenseness which came to the faces of all in the structure, an odd dozen of men who had been listening to Cameron's vicious injunctions.

"Oh!" said the crew boss. "It's you."

Silence again, save for the faint, steady hissing of the light. The entering man stopped in the doorway. Cameron walked forward, or prowled, for his motions had become slow, carrying palpable menace.

"Why'd you disappear in town? What was the 'business' you mentioned in that note?"

"My business," said William Sadler very

evenly. Mentally he said other things, to himself. Something was up. The face of every man in the narrow, long structure showed that.

"Oh!" Cameron sneered, balanced on the balls of his feet, the hate in his eyes a living thing. "Sassy, as usual, eh? Wonder why I've stood it so long?"

"Why?"

"Because of this trouble with the Hemingway crews. I haven't time to fight—we've got to settle this mess first, savvy? And I need every man—you too. But after it's over—anytime—tomorrow—you and me tangle, see? There's only one boss in the woods, boy, and I'm the boss here!"

"So we tangle tomorrow?" asked William Sadler still very evenly. "After settling the Hemingway business? How's that?"

"We're breaking up Hemingway's camp tonight."

"What for?"

"Because the skunks opened the fight themselves. I saw that girl in town and she told me her men were going to put mine out of the woods. On the way back I stopped at her camp, to argue it out, or tried to, and they nearly killed me. Shot at me from the ridge. They signed their own finish, that's all!"

William Sadler abandoned his plan of reasoning, and fell back on its alternative. There could be no reasoning with the timberjacks that night. He could see it in the scowling, flushed faces—Cameron had brought liquor back from town. And Cameron would stop him before any coherent explanation of things could be given. William Sadler smiled.

Cameron smiled in reply, his lips twisted in tight mockery of the other's irony. For Cameron saw what Sadler could not, the form of a man appearing in the doorway behind him. The man was puzzled, but Cameron knew him for a quick thinker, opportunely arrived. For evidently Selkirk's suggestion of killing Sadler on Hem-

ingway land could not be carried out. Sadler's eyes revealed the necessity of silencing him at once.

"Well—don't you agree with the rest?"

"No!" William Sadler seemed to relax. His muscles gathered. "Cameron—you're a dirty liar! You never passed by the Hemingway—"

Cameron sprang in, his face distorted. Sadler moved to smash out at the snarling features, started his cry of alarm to the men waiting in the gloom outside. But both cry and movement were arrested by the shock of a knotty fist, driven full and hard against the base of his head from behind. Sadler's driving right missed Cameron, who piled in, a savage fury in his blows. The roomful of men surged forward, about the doorway, outside to follow the fight.

"Go on!" yelled Cameron, turning from a prostrate figure. "Get going! Up to Hemingway's! Break up the place! You—Steve—you know what to do!" Steve's orders had been received in private—the firing of timber was a crime too great to publicly advocate. "Go on!" yelled Cameron again, his right foot pressed into the stomach of the man prone on the ground. "I'll be right after you—and I'll drag this skunk along, too! He's goin' to fight for the Hercules whether he likes it or not! Go on!"

The mass of men broke up, Steve and three others leaving camp at once, and thus missing the fight which occupied the attention of those who delayed to find clubs or put on skin preserving gloves. Jan and his timber mates did not hear William Sadler's cry, but the hubbub in the bunkhouse, and the surge of dark figures around it a moment later, brought them out at once.

Cameron sensed something wrong, but could not verify his alarm. The man on the ground, who by all laws of nature should have lain unconscious for minutes longer, began to stir vigorously. Cameron,

half turned to see what was causing the moil of figures around him, came back at once, and kicked with characteristic brutality at the groping man's temple. But a twisting shoulder took the blow, and Cameron forgot the turmoil about. In the space of one short week the crew boss had come to hate William Sadler, for no valid reasons save the cold contempt he had always read in the other's eyes. Cameron had seen many emotions in the eyes of men, but never contempt, and his first experience of it made his brutality almost maniacal. Kicking now at that rising figure, all the repressed impulses of the past week surged in the big man, and he forgot time and place and plans.

BIG Jan took note of that fight, occupied as he was with affairs of his own. Since that night in the Hercules club ring, Jan had puzzled over his own defeat, and paid frank tribute to the weaker man who had beaten him. Yet that man had been weaker. Out in the woods, hand to hand, grapple and bite and kneeing, strength to strength, he would have killed that man, Jan had consoled himself. Now that man turned out to be a friend, was mixing it in the shadows with Brick Cameron—Cameron, who was rated by many as good, if not better, than Jan himself—Cameron would kill Sadler, or break him for keeps. Jan tried to reach them, but the general fight always enveloped him, and when finally his crew got the upper hand Cameron and Sadler were out of sight. Gone down the slope, where the moon, now well clear of Mt. Pitchoff's flank, sent long shafts of silver thru the trees.

Jan's hoarse exhortations brought the men together, even the outnumbered, beaten Hercules loggers. Short explanations, still voiced in angry tones, cleared the tension. Where were Sesta and Cameron? The Hercules camp had been expecting that fight for a week. Sesta's name was Sadler—there were complications be-

hind the fight. But the fight itself—that alone interested the muttering, searching band. Cameron's fights were always memorable.

They glimpsed them at last, far down the earth slope where they had rolled, out in a patch of cleared ground. True to the traditions of the timber country, there was no interference. All was elemental, plain, unquestioned—for all the sentiment in that rough shirted group that hurried down and circled the two battling men, they might have been living in the stone age, watching a contest for supremacy between the strongest in the tribe.

And the pale, old moonlight, the still trees, all the vast hush of tumbled earth and sky, were fit parts of the whole, so that William Sadler, who could and sometimes did wear spotless ducks at lawn parties without awkwardness, fought as his progenitors fought.

Big Jan never forgot that fight. Sadler struck with his hands alone, against a man gone mad, who fought with tooth and nail, feet and elbows and knees, who tried every knockout trick of the rough and tumble timber school, from eye gouging to the deadly kicking at his opponent's groin. But Big Jan never forgot Sadler's face—the cold, cruel smile etched on his lips, the whole attitude of contempt, savage, naked, yet somehow controlled. Sadler fought clean instinctively, out of training and habit and nature, yet his cleanness was worse than Cameron's wild roughing. Sadler broke the big crew boss. Big Jan began to swear softly, toward the end.

He had experienced that clever, quick stabbing method of throwing blows out of aim, himself—to him it had been a puzzling science. But Cameron knew that game. Yet the game broke him. For behind Sadler's blows was now a smashing drive the like of which Jan had never seen, a shocking power that had not been behind them a week before.

The hard shock of those blows sounded

clearly on the still night air, again and again, striking Cameron at the right moment of balance and move, so that they never threw him off his feet, yet prevented his closing in. And deliberately the driving fists evaded the jaw point—till Cameron was a gory, tottering wreck of a man.

Big Jan heard himself growling for the knockout. He had seen many fights, and knew. Brick Cameron was broken. He would recover physically, but never again lock gazes with a man, and feel the superiority of strength. It was a queer thing—but Jan had seen it happen before—and when Cameron finally stumbled into a snapping, timed hook that landed flush below his ear—a deliberate knockout blow that spun the big man around and pitched him headlong, Jan muttered his conviction. It had happened again. Brick Cameron would never again order men—not up in the timberlands.

The moon was high in the sky by time the returning crew reached Hemingway land. With them trudged the Hercules jacks, bruised, tired, and curious to hear details of the story Sadler told. Sadler spoke with authority of the controlling powers of the company in New York, and of Selkirk's scheme to rob his own concern. Stumbling along, pushed and prodded, Cameron kept pace with the group, his mind a dull chaos, his spirit stripped even of rancor. Toward the end they were forced to drag him.

And toward the end they heard shots, from the direction of the ridge—a few shots, then silence—then a longer volleying—shouts.

"That might be Steve, Hernie and those other two hard guys!" growled a Hercules man. "They was up to somethin' all the time—them an' Cameron. Outside of Hernie, who was pretty human, hope the rest got shot!"

"Hurry up!" directed Sadler thru split, caked lips. "The girl's up there alone."

They broke into a run, calling loudly

to establish identities. Half of them swerved left to reach the ridge, a long rise of land, a natural breastwork overlooking the slope to camp, while Sadler and the remainder went by straight toward the bunkhouse.

A square of pale light showed beyond, in the grove of pines. Sadler fancied seeing a man's crouched form pass across the window, and a quick uneasiness sent him forward at faster pace, heedless of a shout from behind, which called out the capture of four men. Four. The meaning of the yell came to him when already close to the Hemingway cabin.

"Did they say four?" he called back to the group at his heels.

"Four's right, boss. Quick work, eh?"

It was. A load lifted from Sadler's spirit. But his relief was abruptly dispelled by a cry—a woman's sharp scream—fear laden, loud, coming clear and unmistakable thru the night.

CHAPTER IX

STILL chuckling to himself, as if to obtain satisfaction from the very wreck of his schemes, George Selkirk hastened up the road. The shots had died away, were replaced by shouts. Cameron was carrying out his end of the plan—uselessly, now, as far as money went. Money. Selkirk sneered. Money was everything, and nothing. A man who owned a hundred million dollars had just gone over the roadside, perhaps to his death, and if he struck right he would die as easily as his paid chauffeur. Yet a hundred million dollars—Selkirk cursed at the thought, his strained hilarity passing. He had dreamed of some day inheriting the greater portion of that hundred million.

The incline levelled—ahead was a square bulk—a structure of some sort—another—one with a lighted window, further down among trees. Selkirk paused as sense of the quiet came over him. Where was Cam-

eron and his break-up crew? From farther ahead came a confused shouting, but it somehow lacked the right timbre to mark a general woods fight—Selkirk began to run toward the lighted square among the trees. Perhaps Cameron had finished the business early, and was in the Hemingway cabin baiting the old die-hard—accusing him of having killed the son of Frank Sadler himself. Selkirk swore again, cursing Skeets Donnelly. What a scheme it had been! And he now had to tell Cameron to run for it. Unless—the shock of the thought stopped him not twenty feet from the cabin. If the car, in falling, had killed Frank Sadler and Donnelly, and Cameron had disposed of his cousin, who would ever know the right and wrong of what had happened in the lumber camp? In a quick run Selkirk crossed the distance to the door, and recklessly pushed thru.

Margie Hemingway, pacing agitatedly about the floor, turned as the door burst open, and the quick change of emotions left her pale.

"You! What are you doing here?"

Selkirk gazed around the empty room. There was an excited, wild look in his eyes—his usually flawless hair comb was all ruffled and awry.

"Where's Cameron—your father—anybody?" he muttered incoherently. Then again—"Where's Cameron?"

"How do I know?" the girl's fears tugged at her. She had run out at the first shots from the ridge, but a vehement cook had come hastening toward her, said something about Sadler's orders, and forced her back into the little cabin, telling her to stay there till he returned. Selkirk's entrance could mean but one thing. And he was asking for Cameron—

"Where's Cameron?" repeated the man, his tone growing wild, like his eyes, and harsh. One hundred million dollars, a ransom of kings, a stake unbelievably huge, was hanging in the balance of things—and here in the Hemingway cabin was a

girl, all alone, and very much afraid of something. The ironic uncertainty of it maddened Selkirk. He sprang forward, gripped at the woman's soft throat.

"Talk, you little fool! Where's everybody?"

Margie broke away, and screamed aloud as the wild eyed man sprang after her. She fought him, summoning all her strength, but his slim fingers closed once more around her throat.

"Damn you—tell me what's happening!" He suddenly released her, fell back, and normal fear came to replace his wild impatience. Slowly he began to edge backwards.

A man stood framed in the open doorway—others behind him—but Selkirk scarcely noticed the others.

William Sadler was not a pleasant sight. His face was blood smeared, puffed in places—the heavy mackinaw shirt in rags hung open over a full chest, it was buttonless and decorated with clinging pine needles. But disturbing as was his general appearance, it was Sadler's eyes that sent the blood from Selkirk's face.

"Bill!" he whispered. "Bill—you wouldn't—"

Memories crowded upon William Sadler. He lost his perfect control. The grey, steady eyes blazed with a terrible anger.

"Bill!" whispered Selkirk, dimly understanding. "It's not that, Bill! I wouldn't hurt her—I wanted—"

Retreating steadily, he had reached the partition, felt the give of a door at his back. The touch of that yielding surface galvanized him into motion. He had been half paralyzed by that terrible look on the face of the man slowly advancing after him—panic seized him now as he turned and plunged into the back room, dived blindly over a bed he scarcely saw, struck with jarring shock on the hard floor beyond, but felt no pain. For before him, a square, wide aperture in the barrier of the cabin's rear wall, was an open window.

Somehow he squirmed thru, conscious of that silently raging man close behind him. He struck on soft loam, felt the tear of briars—next instant was out of the flower bed and running, blindly, without thought, toward the road. Dimly he saw a confused huddle of men, moving toward him at right angles—but it was the one behind which occupied Selkirk's mind—the one in whose eyes he had seen the frank and unchecked desire to kill.

Someone saw him, shouted. The shout was taken up—the dim group scattered as its members broke into a run to cut him off. Selkirk heard the thud of footsteps behind him. He veered to the right of the road, toward the steeper pitches, heavily wooded, which he sensed rather than saw. Behind him a rifle spat, a red, quick flare of flame—another. The running man stumbled, recovered, went plunging down the sudden dip of ground, curiously impervious to pain.

He was dully surprised when after a time his leg began to fail his will to move, forced him to hobble, to finally crawl.

He had been hit. The thought repeated monotonously in his mind as he dragged himself down the slope, occasionally lying motionless as sound of searchers drew near. But no one found him in the maze of trunks and dwarf pine sproutings. He finally found time to pass a hand over his numbed thigh—drew it back, sticky, wet. Mumbling to himself, he began to move again, going downslope. Wounded or not, he had to get away. Bill would kill him—the thought occupied his mind to the exclusion of everything else, a thought hedged with queer visions, that seemed to his blurred eyes as real as the pine trunks and the moon in the sky, visions of what Bill had done for him, and how he, Selkirk, had repaid him. And the thought drove him all night, for a surprising distance down the long slope, and along the cool, babbling course of Assai Creek.

BUT the sun, rising golden, strong, above the white crown of old Pitchoff, found him spent. He snarled his resentment at the cheery song of birds—the cheery babble of water. Cuphandle City was miles to the west along the yellow-white band of road he could see half way up the slope—the nearer valleys were yet too far. He could never drag himself over the rounded, wooded hogbacks intervening. His blind panic of the night hours was passing—but even with clear thought he still feared Bill Sadler. Again he examined his leg, prodded it, wincing a bit. The bullet had passed thru an inch below the skin, a superficial flesh wound, that had stiffened his muscles painfully, but was nothing serious of itself. With gritted teeth Selkirk proved it—by standing erect and hobbling a few paces. With proper dressing, and a week's rest, it would be as good as new.

But proper dressing and a week's rest were not in prospect. Long hours of fear had sapped Selkirk's energies, so that he sank limply to the ground after his angry trial at walking, and stared slowly about. The thickly wooded slope, and boulder beds along the stream, hid him from view of the lumber camp, but if men came down to search—

About to act on the thought, and seek a better hiding place where he could think it all out, Selkirk started. A little way downstream he saw movements—the figures of three men encircling and climbing the boulders. With wide, bitter eyes Selkirk stared. Even his revenge had totally failed. He knew those men. Donnelly and Frank Sadler and the driver of the car he had sent over the road rim. The uniformed man was limping badly—Donnelly's left arm was supported by a rude sling made of his coat sleeves, knotted across his chest—but Frank Sadler was apparently unhurt. Selkirk swore soundlessly as he huddled down between two rocks. He was too tired, too weak and dis-

couraged to try for a better place of concealment.

But the three stopped before they reached him—some twenty yards down the trickling stream.

"Go ahead!" Skeets energetic voice carried clearly to Selkirk's ears. He was evidently addressing Sadler. "Go on up! The camp can't be far—right up there, I think. There's smoke. Send some of the boys down after me and Dan, if there's any boys left. If there isn't—"

Selkirk peeped out, a few minutes later. Sadler was scrambling up the slope, already half hidden by the young pine growth. Donnelly and the chauffeur were squatted at the edge of the stream, evidently preparing to wash their bruises in the clear, cold water. Something glinted from a flat rock beside them—a dull blue automatic.

Selkirk's lips curled at the thought which came to him. He had nothing to lose anyway. Rolli and Kiki would confess, under pressure—Selkirk knew the breed—and confession would close the doors of freedom forever behind himself. Selkirk felt no regret. He felt no emotion save a sudden desire to finish it all in some dramatic, spectacular manner. That dull, blue automatic on the rock—

He began to crawl forward, cautiously. The distance seemed interminable. Donnelly and the chauffeur had unconsciously aided him, by edging further downstream to where the water swept over clear gravel—they were now as far from the gun as he was himself.

Both suddenly turned, and Selkirk flattened himself to earth, wondering if they had seen him. Several huge, yellow rocks, and a maze of smaller ones, still intervened between him and the flat stone on which glistened the automatic—he could not see the two men at all, unless he raised his head. But lying there motionless, waiting, he saw what had probably drawn their attention—a horse and buggy, their prog-

ress faintly audible, passing along the road on the slope side. Selkirk recognized the occupants of the antiquated vehicle, and his bitterness peaked to blind anger at the turn of Fate. Esther Lyder and her mother, going into the camp—to Bill—

He left his position—straightened, gritting his teeth in the pain of his wounded leg. A few quick hobbles—

Skeets turned at the sound of crunching gravel, and moved with creditable presence of mind. He reached the flat stone a bit after Selkirk, but in the second that the latter bent for the automatic, Skeets' right foot kicked out sharply, with the snap of a soccer player driving a goal from corner—kicked the weapon out of Selkirk's closing grip. Across the bare surface of the rock they faced each other, Selkirk slowly straightening, a wild featured wreck of the natty Hercules superintendent of but a day gone.

"Well—well!" remarked Skeets pleasantly. "If it isn't little Georgie! How do you do—"

In a blind anger Selkirk struck at the smiling actor, lost his balance, tottered around the rock, and fell. Skeets slowly shook his head.

"Too bad, Georgie, too bad. I guess, by the looks of *you*, that Bill's all right. That's it—swear," he approved. "I understand." He walked over to the automatic, threw out the safety catch with his thumb, and fired the three remaining cartridges into the water, as if enjoying the quick, high splashes the angry lead cut.

"There, Georgie—that won't bother you any more. And it might wake those fellows up—whatever they're doing. I'm hungry."

FRANK SADLER'S discourse to a somewhat surly body of men was interrupted by those shots, and further interrupted by the arrival of a buggy from Cuphandle City, with Mrs. Lyder and her daughter in the seat behind the driver. When explanations had been made all

around, and a group sent after the impatient Skeets, Sadler went back to his stump. His audience was a rugged score of timberjacks—bruised, silent, noncommittal of aspect—a very bruised nephew, and a girl whose auburn, curled hair flanked the nephew's shoulder. Mrs. Lyder and her daughter, wondering if they were in the movies, stood a bit to one side—the driver of the buggy leaned forward in his seat, rapt in contemplation of a man who owned one hundred million dollars, half surprised that such a man was human—could show emotion.

Frank Sadler did show emotion—and the sincerity of it broke thru the stolid suspicion of the timberjacks. It was no namby pamby speech the financier made—there was nothing mushy about Frank Sadler. He had worked in the woods himself, had come down the Penobscot booms, in the old Maine logging days, riding the famous "VYV" drives and later squandering his pay in the hilarity of the annual celebration of the jacks in Bangor.

The old memories rose within him as he spoke, and because of them he spoke over and thru the barrier of millions—of estates and cars and yachts—that was between him and the listening men. He spoke their language, free from trimmings, vigorous as the life which it expressed. And they cheered him, suddenly—cheered his promise of harmony in the future on the Assai ridges, and a raise of pay to affect every jack in the company's employ—and the company, he stated, his voice clothed with the authority that had come to him, meant the Hemingway timber tracts as well as Hercules land, for he had decided to buy.

"And last of all," he summed up, his strong face expressive, "I want you to know that in all my life I have never known what pride meant, until last night, or rather, today. Not in my money making enterprises have I received the satisfaction that was mine in knowing that my broth-

er's son, Bill, here was a *man*—a man of his hands, with a heart and nerves—”

Hoarse cheering cut off the remainder of his words, and he stepped down from the stump, head high. Bill Sadler, his bruised face a bit flushed, nodded at the older man's low request.

“Wait a while for me, will you Marge? I've something to settle with Uncle Frank. I'll be right back.”

“And I apologize,” repeated Frank Sadler, financial giant whose favor was sought by every type from petty speculator to representatives of powerful but moneyless nations. “I apologize sincerely, boy.”

“Just a minute.” The younger man's voice was metal hard. They were in the cabin, faced across the small table beside a squat kitchen range. And they were of a height, the young man and the older, grey thinning hair level with the tousled mop of brown. “Just a minute! That'll never happen again? A row like *that*?” he asked.

The grey head bowed a little.

“No, Bill—I must have had indigestion that morning.”

“Listen,” said Bill Sadler. “I was in a raided night club once, in New York, because George took me there, and I wanted a line on some shady friends he had. He told you I took him there. You believed it. You believed I was going to the dogs—while George—George was no go-getter. Yet all the time I knew things about George I hated to disclose. His father was mixed up in very crooked politics once—you know that yourself—but what you didn't know was that George was worse than his dad. How could I tell you—when I'd talk you'd look me over as if I was some sort of a strange animal. And that last day, holding that cheap skate up to me as an example, telling me to imitate him—O, what's the use?” The speaker's shoulders shrugged. “No sense in going melodramatic over it. But it was poor busi-

ness, that's all I have to say,” he finished frankly.

“It was, Bill,” admitted Frank Sadler, his tone low. “I was so angry at even thought of weakness in you that I misjudged you. But what of it—now? All that is past. Give me the chance to square it, boy. Providence brought us together—”

“And I want you to know I didn't come here on purpose. It was coincidence pure and simple. I hated to get off in these hills, because I knew you had lately bought timber holdings here—but I was unacquainted with details. I didn't know the Hercules was connected with you or I wouldn't even have fought for those fifty dollars!”

“I'm glad you did, Bill. I want you to forget all that, boy. I need you now—need you to carry on where I'm beginning to fail—”

Something like a twinkle came to Bill Sadler's eyes.

“What? The big bear of Wall Street beginning to fail? Frank Sadler?”

“I'm sixty, boy—and I need help. Won't you shake on it? Pals?”

Bill Sadler shook, grinning.

“Pals—uncle. One thing, tho. I want a vacation before I begin to shoulder responsibilities. I told you I was going to Alaska and make a million in a year—don't you think I can do it?”—he broke the thought.

“Sure!” proudly agreed Frank Sadler. “Easily!”

“Well—since then, Alaska's stuck in my mind. I'm going there on my honeymoon. O. K.?”

“Honeymoon? Great!” enthused the older man. “Marriage, boy, is the best thing in the world, for a man. And I think Esther is a—”

“Esther?” asked William Sadler coldly. “Who said Esther?”

“Yes—who did?” piped a feminine voice, as Mrs. Lyder's daughter and Mrs. Lyder entered the cabin. “What on earth

are you two doing here, talking about Esther? Bill," she went on, approaching closer. "Is it about my foolish mistake? My pretended engagement to George? Of course you understand—"

"Everything," smiled William Sadler. "It's you who don't see some things, Esther dear." He touched her lightly under the chin. "But don't worry—there's many a young man back in New York. You'll excuse me? I have something important to attend to."

OUTSIDE, he met Skeets. They both stopped, and regarded each other.

"Bill—old horse!"

William Sadler shook hands, then stepped back, and frowned prodigiously.

"Fine time to get here! What you been doing?"

"Riding Packards down the mountain-sides," replied Skeets. "What's it to you? Another thing. I caught Georgie for you. And Kiki! Boy—that's a story for you. Reading latest news about Danny Rocks, the Chicago gun man, get sleepy, take off my shoes, and in comes Kiki, and I'm Danny Rocks. A better racketeer than any in the loop. Wait'll I tell you all of it. But about Georgie? What are you going to do with him? And Cameron? He's tied like a bologna sausage in that shack."

"I don't care about Georgie now," replied William Sadler truthfully. "If I had caught him last night—" his eyes hardened momentarily, then he shrugged. "Well—the law can handle him, I guess. And Cameron, too. But you?" frowning again. "So you finished Kiki? Have you been drinking lately?"

"Nope."

"Still a fatalist?"

"Yeup."

"What way?"

"The right way."

"Married yet?"

"Nope."

"Why not?"

"Because I had to come up here and save your skin, that's why. How about the parrot?"

William Sadler's frown grew very menacing.

"No more parrots, Donnelly. Say—I'm going to Alaska—want to come along?"

Skeets stared.

"I'm marrying. No joke, Bill!"

"What of it? You going to hibernate after marriage?"

Skeets followed a quick glance, saw a girl waiting by the bunkhouse, and suddenly grinned. He guessed at things.

"Not me. I'm going to tell Mary, that's Dolly, that I'm a roaring he-man who refuses to hibernate." He extended his hand. "Shake, Bill! You're a fast worker. Alaska it is. But don't change your mind again!"

William Sadler grinned back.

"I'm talking ahead of time. Maybe it's no go—"

"Columbus took a chance," observed Skeets reminiscently, "and look what's come of it. Get going, you slow poke!"

Half an hour later, going by the bunkhouse, he was hailed by Bill's voice. Bill was evidently going somewhere in a hurry, and the bridle reins in his hands showed he was going to harness a horse.

"Skeets—get ready!"

Skeets danced a little jig. "Alaska—here we come! Here we co-o—"

"No! No Alaska!" said William Sadler, "Honolulu!"

Skeets nearly fell.

"What?"

"Sure! Winter's coming, you sap! Who ever heard of a double honeymoon in Alaska in Winter? Haven't you any brains at all?"

"No!" grinned Skeets, hitching at his belt. "I can't use 'em anyway. The world changes too fast. But Bill—!"

"Yes?"

"It's a good world!" Turning, he whistled softly to himself, and the faint, lilting sound went up into the pine tops.



FROZEN FRONTIER

by
CLIFF CAMPBELL

On the bleak coast of British Columbia a ruthless gang of killers sets the stage for a robbery breathtaking in its magnitude and daring.

THE *Estrella* was a beautiful thing but fifty men had said, "She'll have to come down in the water." The naval architect and the builder knew it—everyone did except Martin Saunders, her new, proud and harried owner.

"When will you fellows quit spending my money?" he stormed when at last they broke the news. "Why not gravel or steel punchings?"

"There is no room for such light ballast," he was told. "It will have to be lead."

"How much?"

"At least two tons."

"And what does lead cost?"

"Twelve cents."

Saunders worked that out and then cursed all naval architects and boat builders and his own desire for a yacht. The builder was called to the phone. He returned soon, grinning.

"They heard you down in Salmon Bay," he said. "A man just offered me two and a half tons of pig lead at six cents if I take it all."

"That's the first good news you've given me!" Saunders exclaimed. "He probably stole it, but I don't care. I want that boat ready to sail for British Columbia tomorrow."

GREGORY IVES returned to his room at noon, expecting important mail. He was disappointed in finding only a single letter, the address rudely written, the envelope soiled and smelling of fish.

But amusement and tenderness mingled in Greg's smile when he unfolded the sheet within. A few savages and some boys send

letters like it. There was no writing, only rough sketches and symbols, but as Greg studied them the smile faded and he leaned forward in sudden alarm. As unmistakably as though they were plain print, the rude drawings told a story of danger and carried

a plea for help.

A business engagement of vital importance, for it meant the possible salvage of the remnants of his father's estate, was scheduled for the afternoon; a long-sought position at a good salary was to be assumed the next week, but Greg did not even use the telephone at his elbow. A half hour after reading the strange letter he was aboard his forty-foot cruiser, the *Wanderer*, and in another thirty minutes he had started for Wright Sound, five hundred miles to the northwest, up the inside passage to Alaska.

For thirty-three hours after passing the locks in Seattle, Greg did not leave the wheel. Then he dropped anchor, had some sleep and was off again. It was a gruelling grind, and as he battled with the big Pacific swells and short, ugly chop off Cape Caution he wondered if he hadn't been a fool for coming. Sometimes he spread the letter on the chart table and studied it.

The rough sketches and symbols were not unlike the picture writing of the Ojibway Indians. That is really where they had their origin, back in Minnesota and Ontario when Greg was a boy and Ben Wallace was his father's guide. They had worked it out together, Greg with intense earnestness, Ben with something more than an amused tolerance. The woodsman

could not read or write. A means of communication gratified him and appealed to the healthy, romantic interests of the boy.

Greg's father had blazed a devious game trail across the continent. It had terminated far up the British Columbia coast, where a rather pretentious camp was about the only physical monument to a fair-sized fortune and a lifetime devoted to hunting and fishing. Ben, who had followed the elder Ives for twenty-five years, was caretaker, and it was from there the letter had come.

The message was unmistakable. It told plainly that Ben was in danger, needed help. A hint of desperate outlaws only added to Greg's mystification. He could not understand the presence of such a band in a wilderness almost entirely uninhabited.

Ben, too, was not without assistance. The camp had been leased for the season to an Eastern man, Frank Stanton, who was now occupying it with a party of friends. The world around, sportsmen are much alike. Greg knew the class and, while he had not seen Stanton, an agent having negotiated the lease, he had confidence Ben was among friends.

In the end Greg gave up puzzling over it, confined his attention to navigating, working the tides, getting there as quickly as possible, and at four o'clock Sunday afternoon he approached a hidden cove northeast of Wright Sound. He slowed down to enter, eyes ready for the first glimpse of the camp past the starboard point. It was not until he was abreast of it that he became aware of an upright and two crossed sticks just above high-water mark on the outside.

A boyhood memory made him reach for the reverse lever. Ben Wallace had left that sign on many a trail. It fairly shouted, "Danger! Go back!" But already the *Wanderer* had slid into view of the hunting lodge. Greg saw four people on the veranda and the entire peacefulness

and order of the scene held him motionless. Magazines on a table, three men and a woman reclining at ease, the quiet of the wilderness and of a hidden corner of the sea—danger and outlawry were absurd. Confused and relieved, Greg let the *Wanderer* glide up to the float, where he made fast and shut off his motor.

THE four people on the veranda, two hundred feet away, were still staring at him as he started ashore. Before he reached land the young woman leaped to her feet.

"It's Greg Ives!" she cried, and dashed down the steps and came flying along the path.

One of the men arose quickly, turned to his companions, then followed with a swift stride.

Greg walked slowly on, staring curiously. He did not remember ever having seen this girl before and yet there was something vaguely familiar in the impetuous dash, in the swift, competent stride, and particularly in the way she held her head, with short crinkly hair, flashing bronze in the sunlight, thwarting the efforts of the breeze.

She came running up, smiling so warmly, her welcome so exuberant, Greg responded with quickened step, took the hand she offered.

"I'm so glad you could come after all!" she cried in what was, to Greg, an unnecessarily loud tone, until he caught a note of forced excitement. "I'd hardly dared expect you."

She slipped a hand through his arm, started him toward the house. She clung closely, looking up with dancing eyes. Her nearness, and the pressure of her hand, more than startled Greg. They enthralled him.

And then he heard, in a faint undertone: "Play up. Known me for years. Came for me."

Aloud she cried gaily: "I was so afraid

you wouldn't get my last letter. I wasn't sure where you were."

"I started as soon as I received it," Greg answered.

"I knew you would!" and then, in a quick whisper, "We've got to get away! Somehow! Follow my lead."

"Ben wrote me, too," Greg said loudly, and he felt her hand tremble. "When do you want to start?"

"When you're ready. Here's Mr. Stanton. I've been an awful nuisance, dropping into a men's camp so unexpectedly, but they've been very nice about it."

A tall man was coming rapidly toward them. Greg felt a warning squeeze.

"How are you, Mr. Ives," Stanton said as he stopped and extended his hand. "If you've come to learn how we like your place, I'll have to tell you it's a wonder. Haven't regretted taking it for a moment."

"I'm glad to hear that," Greg answered. "I've hardly been here since my father died, but there is marvelous fishing and shooting."

"I'll say there is. Didn't think the continent had anything like it left. Nice boat, you have there."

"Able little craft. How's Ben?"

"Ben!" Stanton repeated uncertainly. "Oh, yes! Old Wallace. I'm glad you happened along just now. Was going to write you. He left last week. Just packed up and went off without a word. Ever notice anything strange about him?"

"Strange!" Greg exclaimed without an attempt to conceal his indignation. "No."

"We did. Don't know whether he didn't like us, or was getting old, or just turned queer. Nothing we did seemed to please him. Couldn't get it into his head that a lease entitled us to some rights. Grouched around until I had to tell him what was what. He sulked for a few days and then disappeared."

Greg stopped, and stared at Stanton.

"Where did he go?" he demanded.

"He didn't say and we didn't have a chance to ask," Stanton replied indifferently. "The truth is, we didn't care. It's been a lot more pleasant without him."

Greg's anger flared. Misrepresentation of the genial, lovable woodsman who had been his boyhood hero and later his close friend drove him to quick defense. It was then he became conscious of the girl. There was no change in her face, no clear sound of warning, and yet in that level, steady stare he knew he had received one.

"I'm sorry," Greg answered evenly. "Ben knew the place and the best fishing and I would have said anyone was in luck to have him. I felt perfectly safe in insisting that he be kept on."

Stanton shrugged his shoulders.

"Why didn't you answer my letter?" the girl asked suddenly. "I wasn't even sure you would come for me."

It jolted Greg into his part.

"I was away," he answered. "Down the sound on a club cruise."

ALL three were walking toward the house now. Greg glanced at the girl beside him. There was an intense aliveness about her to which he had responded instantly, but he could not place her. Trim sport clothes and an assured manner told him she did not belong to that desolate bit of coast, and he felt equally certain she had no connection with Stanton.

Her eyes met his again, in that steady stare, and as clearly as though she had spoken he knew she was admonishing him to play her game.

"When did you get here?" he asked casually.

"Three days ago. I went to Prince Rupert from Vancouver and found a small boat to bring me down here."

"Yes," Stanton said, "she played in hard luck. Her uncle left two days before she arrived."

Greg dropped a package of cigarettes to

cover his amazement. "Uncle" must refer to one of Stanton's guests.

"That's what I can't understand!" the girl exclaimed. "I wrote him two months ago and had an answer. He knew I was coming, and the date."

"Looks funny, his skipping out without a word," Stanton commented.

Greg glanced swiftly at them both.

"It's a long time since I've seen Uncle Ben," the girl said. "Not since he came west. And his not being able to write—it was hard to tell what sort he was."

The whole thing overwhelmed Greg. Of course that swift, competent stride and the bronze glints in her hair were familiar. He remembered her perfectly, back in Ontario, when she spent a summer vacation with Ben. Ben's brother was her father. She was an orphan and Ben had educated her. A wild, vivid little thing of fourteen, she was a hoyden to seventeen-year-old Greg.

Now he no sooner grasped this fact than the problem of Ben thrust itself to the fore. He recalled the girl's name, Ann Wallace, remembered how Ben adored her, and now she was speaking as casually of his disappearance as did Stanton.

Greg walked on in silence. The two men on the veranda did not rise. They sat staring at him with an impassivity that, in conjunction with all that had happened, he found disconcerting. Stanton, still casual, introduced him. Dalquest and Winn were their names. Neither arose. Only Winn offered his hand, and then limp fingers. Dalquest grunted, "Glad ter meetcher."

Greg took the chair Stanton pushed forward with a foot. The three did not look at him now but sat staring across the cove.

"Will we start this evening?" Ann Wallace asked.

Greg hesitated. It wasn't because he was tired. He felt Ben's letter was not ill founded, that Ben was not far away and needed help. But Stanton was speaking.

"Couldn't think of it. There are a few things I'd like to talk over with Mr. Ives.

Can't have him leave his own place without being out guest for a night."

There was no warmth in his tone. Greg glancing up at him, saw Ann Wallace beyond, and her face was pale.

"Sorry," Greg said, "but I can't stop. I'll have Ann in Prince Rupert by morning."

"Won't think of it," Stanton repeated. "There's lots of room in the house. You'll stay tonight."

Dalquest and Winn shifted their gaze from the water to Greg. It was only for an instant, and it was enough. As nothing else since his arrival, that mingling of contempt and cold savagery impressed a sense of danger.

"You seem to be very tired," Ann Wallace said with sudden compassion. "Perhaps we had better wait until morning."

CHAPTER II

GREG IVES accepted the girl's decision for the moment. She had been there longer, understood the situation more clearly, and that situation, Greg realized, was one of immediate and extreme danger.

Even had he not seen Ben's warning at the entrance, Winn and Dalquest would cause anyone to step carefully. They were young men, normal in appearance if one did not see their eyes. But they failed utterly to fit into a picture of sportsmen whose love for the out-of-doors had taken them across a continent. The carbon ground into the skin of Winn's hands indicated a mechanical pursuit. Dalquest was small and slender, and his hands were almost effeminate.

Their eyes betrayed them. Greg wondered how they could pass a policeman on the street without being arrested on suspicion. He had never felt just as he did when they looked at him. He had seen hot fury, never such cold malevolence.

Winn began searching through his pockets.

"Left my pipe on the *Templar*," he said, and arose.

Dalquest followed him down the steps. It seemed natural enough, yet Greg, every sense alert, glanced at Ann to see if she, too, felt an undercurrent of something sinister. The girl was watching the two men walk down to the float, where the *Wanderer* and the *Templar*, a fifty-footer Stanton had purchased in Seattle, were moored.

Stanton himself remained cool and indifferent, even when he arose and said, "We've had a lot of trouble with the oil burner in the kitchen stove. Can you show us how it works?"

Ann remained in her chair when the men walked to the door.

"Better come," Stanton suggested. "You use it most."

Greg found the generator clogged with carbon and took it out for cleaning. Ann walked back toward the living room door. Stanton turned sharply.

"You'll learn more if you see its inner workings," he said.

"I don't want to see how it works," she retorted with a touch of defiance. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"It's an interesting contrivance. Come look at it."

Greg glanced up at the tone. It was a command, cold and harsh. Ann hesitated, then walked back to the stove.

Greg worked with nervous, fumbling fingers. His impulse was to leap to his feet and swing a wrench at Stanton's head, but as he arose Ann stepped between them.

The generator was cleaned and replaced. In ten minutes a bright, blue flame was burning. Dalquest and Winn entered the kitchen, looked at Stanton, walked out again.

"Thanks," Stanton said. "We'll cook dinner now."

Greg remained in the kitchen, hoping to

speak to Ann alone, but Stanton did not leave. As the two prepared the meal, Greg walked to the rear door.

"Don't leave," Stanton said sharply. "We'll eat in a moment."

Winn appeared instantly at the living room door, stood there watching. Greg looked out. There were two or three small out-buildings, the nearest Ben Wallace's own cabin. Ben had always used a home-made wooden latch. Now the door was fastened by a padlock and the windows were curtained by blankets.

"Dinner's ready," Stanton called.

It was a strange meal. Winn and Dalquest ate in silence, never looking up from their plates. For a time Ann tried to talk to Greg. He admired her bright courage, responded to it until the ominous atmosphere of the table weighted them both to silence. Then Stanton turned suddenly to Greg.

"Have you ever seen one of the little white bears on Princess Royal Island?" he asked.

FOR a moment Greg stared in amazement. After his first greeting, Stanton had displayed no interest in fish or game. There were no evidences that he, Winn or Dalquest had even been after trout.

"Yes," Greg answered slowly. "I saw the one the Indian caught, the first known to white men."

"Ever been after them yourself?"

"My father and I made a few trips together. He shot one and later he and Ben caught a cub alive."

"Then you know the best place to go?"

Stanton's interest had seemed so genuine Greg was puzzled, but the last statement aroused him.

"Why didn't you ask Ben?" he retorted. "He knew more about the white bears than anyone."

"He wouldn't tell me anything," Stanton answered indifferently. "And I wanted more than anything else to get one."

"But it's the closed season," Gregg said.

"We have a special permit. Specimens for a museum in the East and a pair for a zoo, if we can catch them alive."

He displayed considerable knowledge of the animal only recently seen for the first time. Smaller than a black bear, white without the yellowish tinge of the polar bear, it lives, so far as is known, only on Princess Royal Island, bordering the inside passage to Alaska. To Greg's amazement, he learned that Stanton even had stopped in Victoria to see the only specimen in captivity.

Stanton also asked many questions. He sent Winn to the *Templar* for a chart and learned where Greg and his father had hunted and where the most likely places were. Greg answered freely, hoping he could discover what lay back of this interest, but when he had told all he knew Stanton relapsed into silence.

Dalquest finished eating, looked at his watch and went immediately to the radio, where he began tuning in.

"Won't you get San Francisco?" Ann asked. "I want to dance with Greg and the music there is so much better."

Dalquest ignored her and soon they heard the voice of the announcer in Ketchikan. Ann started toward the instrument.

"Leave it alone," Stanton said sharply.

Greg started from his chair, his eyes blazing angrily. Ominous as the situation was, the thought of this vivid creature being subjected to such a treatment was more than he could stand. But as he arose an orchestra began a fox trot and Ann glided quickly to him, arms outstretched, body swaying to the rhythm, eyes inviting and yet flashing a warning. They moved off together.

After a few turns of the small space, Ann maneuvered Greg into a corner and he heard a faint whisper, "Hang onto yourself."

They danced around the room and, again

in the corner, Greg murmured, "We've got to make a break for it."

"No!" she breathed fiercely, and her fingers dug into his arm.

Before the dance music ceased she found opportunity to whisper, "Watch what happens."

Stanton and his companions sat stolidly while the orchestra played but now, when the announcer spoke again, Greg sensed a change. None of the three moved, but each had shifted his gaze to the radio.

"The man who has charmed Alaska, the sweet tenor of the Arctic, will now favor you with a group of songs."

Even in Ann, Gregg sensed a tension.

"You will hear the songs you knew when you were young," the announcer continued. "the songs you sang when you mushed over the long trail to gold in the days of ninety-eight."

Greg was puzzled. The expressions of the three men had not changed, and yet there was something unusual about them. The room tingled with it. Ann, standing in the kitchen door, was listening breathlessly. When the song ceased she turned brightly to Stanton.

"Can't we please have San Francisco now?" she asked.

Winn glared at her. Stanton did not indicate he had heard. The tenor began a second song, and again the three listened.

BUT a change had come over them. Greg felt and yet could not define it. It was as if the radio had done more than repeat sounds made so far away, had carried to that remote spot in the wilderness something as uncanny as itself.

With the last words of the song, Stanton arose and looked at Greg.

"You're tired, Ives, and want to go to bed," he said in a tone that made it a command. "I'll show you to your room."

Greg started.

"I'll sleep aboard the *Wanderer*," he announced.

"Couldn't think of it," Stanton said shortly. "Lots of room here. Winn, go down with Ives and help him bring up whatever he needs."

Greg hesitated. His desire was to bring the situation to a head, to test Stanton with a refusal, and then he saw Ann looking at him with that steady glance of warning. He went out the door and Winn followed.

The stateroom in the *Wanderer* was forward, the main-cabin aft. Greg led Winn into the latter and said, "I'll get some pajamas."

There was a revolver in a locker forward, but Winn ignored Greg's remark, followed him closely, watched everything he took.

"Look here!" Greg exclaimed. "Tell Stanton I've changed my mind. I'll sleep here tonight."

Winn laughed, amusedly.

"You'd better come back," he said. "Stanton's fussy. Seems queer at first but you'll get used to him."

"He's more than queer," Greg retorted, and then as a new thought came to him he asked, "Is he sane?"

"He's sane enough, and don't think he ain't. Get what you're after and come along. It'll save trouble."

There was no chuckle in Winn's voice now. He was distinctly threatening, and he kept his right hand in his coat pocket.

When they returned to the house, Ann had disappeared. Stanton led the way down the hall, opened a door, wished Greg a curt "Good night." As he left he turned the key in the lock.

Greg sprang at once to the window. It was nailed. He returned to the door and listened. For a few moments he could distinguish the voices of all three men in the living room. Then he heard a door close and there were no more sounds.

Again he examined the fastenings of the window and tried the door. He knew he could kick his way out but he did not care to take that chance if one of the three

remained in or near the house. He sat down on the bed to wait.

In a few minutes he heard the hum of an outboard motor in the cove. It was broken off short and Greg knew it had rounded the rocky point at the entrance and was in the channel outside. He was not left long in doubt as to whether all three men had gone. Someone entered the door and sat down in the living room.

Greg waited. Once he caught the faint sound of the outboard motor down the channel. An hour later he heard a deeper sound, knew a larger boat was outside. But it did not come closer, and its exhaust finally died away.

It was nearly midnight now. Single-handed, Greg had driven a small boat more than five hundred nautical miles up the inside passage with only one stop for rest. Drowsiness won over the sense of mystery and the knowledge of danger. He was awakened by Stanton announcing breakfast.

Ann was at the table when he entered the living room. She greeted him with a quick smile, though her eyes flashed anxiety. Dalquest was there but Winn was absent, nor did he come in after they had finished.

Greg arose and turned casually to Ann. "I'm ready to start any time you are," he said.

"You're not going," Stanton announced coldly.

Dalquest laughed savagely. Stanton lit a cigarette.

"Are you a fool or do you think I am?" he demanded. "If you are, you'll be shot your first funny move. Watch 'em, Dalquest, while I get some sleep. I'll spell you later."

"Go out on the porch and sit down," Dalquest commanded when Stanton had gone.

He made a significant gesture toward a shoulder holster and Greg and Ann obeyed, took chairs at the end farthest from the door. Dalquest followed, sat facing them,

and there the three remained. After a little while Greg spoke to Ann in a low tone.

"Don't!" Dalquest snapped.

"You mean we can't talk?" Greg flared.

"What good'll it do you?"

The sinister portent of the question chilled Greg's anger. Mystery and a suggestion of danger had given way to imminent peril. Dalquest reeked with it. Greg had never known a man with so deadly an aura.

Then he became conscious of Ann, understood what she must have endured since her arrival. His anger mounted again. He sat there, waiting his chance, planning, devising an attack.

But the chance never came. Dalquest was as patient and tireless as he was dangerous. Once Greg moved slightly and the automatic snapped into view.

STANTON appeared at noon and summoned Ann to help prepare luncheon. After they had eaten, Dalquest went down the hall. Stanton chose the living room. Ann lay down on a couch. Whether she slept or only pretended to, Greg did not know. The hours dragged interminably. Stanton seemed hardly aware of the presence of the other two, unless Greg moved in his chair. The man was motionless. Even his gaze hardly shifted, but his eyes shone brilliantly.

Dinner time came. Dalquest was called. He ate little, at least pushed back his chair.

"We're taking chances!" he burst forth angrily. "There's no use in it. I'd like to know this thing is jake."

"You're taking orders!" Stanton snapped. "Everything's jake so long as I'm running it. Herd these two into the kitchen and see that they wash the dishes."

He arose from the table and went down the hall. After Ann and Greg had cleared the table they heard him go out the front door. They had not finished washing the dishes before he returned.

"Beat it," he said to Dalquest, and the

young man went down to the float, where he started an outboard motor in one of the *Templar's* dinghies and left the cove.

Again Stanton guarded his prisoners in the living room, but he was not so still and tense as in the afternoon. He looked at his watch often, glanced out the window. At last, in the first dusk, he arose and strode to the hall door. Suddenly he wheeled upon Ann and Greg, an automatic in his right hand.

"Listen, you two!" he said harshly. "Stay where you are. Understand? Don't leave your seats."

He turned, and they heard his footsteps as he went to his room. Instantly Greg was at Ann's side.

"Get down to the *Wanderer*; cast off the lines!" he whispered. "Run!"

He waited until she was off the veranda, then crossed to the hall, closed and locked the door. Stanton's room faced away from the water and he knew he would not be seen as he went flying down the trail after Ann.

She had loosened the *Wanderer's* lines before Greg reached the float.

"Get aboard and lie down on the floor in the main-cabin," he commanded.

He started his motor, threw the clutch into reverse. In thirty seconds he had backed away and was heading toward the entrance at full speed. As he looked back he saw Ann still standing behind him.

"You might have been hit if he had chased us!" Greg exclaimed.

"We're not going to be chased," she said without turning. "Didn't you see? He wanted us to escape."

"What? After he and Dalquest spent the day——"

"But didn't you see he was different tonight, excited? And last night——"

"You mean the radio? I got that. Have they been listening every night?"

"Just to that Ketchikan tenor, only last night——"

"They got a signal."

ANN and Greg had been shooting questions, comments and answers rapidly and excitedly. Now they looked at each other in silence for a moment. It was the first time they had found an opportunity to talk freely. Greg remembered that in reality they were strangers, and yet he felt that in the thirty hours since he had seen her they had been brought very close together. He knew at least that here was a girl with courage and quick wit.

"I'll hand it to you!" he exclaimed impetuously. "That was a hard gang to be marooned with. Any girl I know— Well, you did it!"

"There was nothing else," Ann answered shortly. "Tears wouldn't have helped. Playing the fool got me further. But," and she looked at Greg with frank admiration, "how did you hold on to yourself? I was afraid every minute you would kick up a row and——"

"I wouldn't have lasted long," Greg said grimly. "But what's it mean? What's their game? Did you learn anything?"

"No more than you did."

"And you didn't get any hint as to what happened to Ben?"

"No, but they never let him walk off as they said they did."

"I think he's a prisoner in his own cabin. There was a padlock on the door and the windows were curtained."

"Stanton and Winn went out there every day," Ann said.

Greg looked back toward the cove they had just left. Darkness had come. Already the shadows beneath the western shore were black.

"Ben's alive!" Greg exclaimed confidently. "He's too good a woodsman for a bunch of city crooks, and if they had killed him they would never have let us go. I can't guess what they're up to, though. They've spent money, leasing the camp, buying the *Templar*, and there's nobody—nothing—along this coast to rob."

"But they are up to something," Ann

insisted. "That tenor gave them a signal last night. You could feel it in the air. And today—Winn gone, Dalquest leaving, Stanton making it easy for us to escape! Whatever they're planning is to be done tonight."

Greg nodded, looked back again toward the cove.

"Something's burning!" Ann cried.

Greg whirled, sniffed, then lifted the hatch beneath his feet. At once he closed the throttle and threw the switch to stop the motor.

"That was a little too easy, our getting away," he said. "Remember Stanton leaving while we washed the dishes? He fixed the motor then."

"He wanted us out of the way but he didn't want us to get to Prince Rupert in time to notify the police," Ann added.

Greg lifted both hatches in the pilot house floor, exposed the motor beneath. An odor of hot oil arose and they could hear the bubble of boiling water in the cylinder jackets.

CHAPTER III

GREG lowered himself into the engine compartment.

"He only closed the sea cock!" he exclaimed after a few moments' examination.

He opened it, started the motor, but no water came from the outlet.

"That's queer," Greg muttered as he stopped the motor.

The pump was removed, examined and replaced. Pipes were rapped to dislodge possible obstructions of rust and scale. Greg went through all the usual, operations, but without result.

"Don't see what he could have done in so short a time," he said as he began to dismantle the entire cooling system. "Why did you stay in camp?"

"There was no way to leave," Ann answered. "I came down from Prince Ru-

pert on a fishing boat that stopped only long enough to let me off, though it didn't take five minutes to guess something was wrong. We're moving, Greg?"

"There's a big ebb," he explained. "Current runs pretty well in these channels. It's taking us away from camp, out toward Wright Sound. Wish there were some place I could leave you."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going back there. Ben's in a jam and I can't run off and leave him."

"But they'll see you, hear the boat."

"I'll come in from behind, over the mountain. I doubt, though, if they're still there."

"You mean that whatever they'll do will be done tonight," Ann nodded. "The signal over the radio last night, Winn and Dalquest leaving, Stanton letting us escape, fixing the *Wanderer* so we couldn't get out to warn anyone—but what can they be doing?"

Greg's head was down in the bilge while he worked at a pipe connection.

"I've spent a day trying to puzzle it out," he answered. "We're more than a hundred miles from Prince Rupert and the same from Ocean Falls, the only towns north of Vancouver. Except for an occasional fisherman or hand logger, there's no one living along this coast. There's nothing that would interest even a petty thief. The only thing I can think of is that some criminal gang thought the camp would be a good place to hide out."

"And last night they learned all was clear. How long would it take us to get to Prince Rupert?"

"Twelve hours."

"They know we would report to the police as quickly as possible. They counted on that, held us until the last minute."

"And this was part of it!" Gregg exclaimed as he rose from the bilge. "Stanton certainly fixed things. Knew it would give him a couple more hours."

He had disconnected a pipe and found

a wooden plug driven tightly inside. It was several minutes before he could get it out and half an hour before he had the water cooling system reassembled.

While he worked down in the bilge, Ann kept watch from the pilot house windows. They were drifting down a channel between high mountain walls, being carried out to Wright Sound by the tide. It was like being in a canyon, under those sheer cliffs, and the shadows were black.

"There's a ship!" Ann cried excitedly when Greg had nearly finished his work. "It will have wireless. If we can stop it, tell what we know, they could send out a warning."

Greg climbed up and looked.

"No chance," he said. "An Alaskan liner south-bound, crossing Wright Sound. She's five miles away, making at least fifteen knots."

He dropped below again.

"But if we could, Greg! It's all lighted up. There are so many people so close. It might lead to Stanton being caught. Isn't there some way we can stop them?" Ann stooped to talk to him. She was greatly excited. "Isn't there some way to signal? A light?" She jumped to her feet, looked down the channel. "It's gone!" she cried. "Just disappeared!"

Greg tightened the last pipe connection. He climbed from the engine compartment, closed the hatches.

"She went past a point," he said. "We can see only a bit of the sound from here."

"Can't we chase her?"

"Chase fifteen knots with nine?" he laughed. "The only thing for us to do is to find Ben."

HE STARTED the motor, satisfied himself the water was circulating, let in the clutch and turned the *Wanderer* back up the channel by which they had come.

"See here," he said as he switched on a small light over the chart table. "The camp's in this cove. If we go past it, or

into Gardner Canal, we can run up this arm and anchor at the head. Ben has a cabin there. Used it trapping. There is a trail, of a sort, over the mountain to camp, about two miles."

"We'll walk across and, if Uncle Ben is a prisoner in his cabin, we can release him."

"I'll go," Greg amended. "I feel pretty certain Stanton and his crew have left but there's no use your running chances."

He had swung close to the western shore to catch an eddy in a big bight, for the ebb was still running, and now, as they passed beneath towering cliffs, the *Wanderer* began to pitch and roll. Ann clung to the door frame, Greg to the wheel.

"Something's passing us," he said, and he strained his eyes against the darkness. "Fast boat, too, and a big one."

"Could it be Stanton, in the *Templar*?"

"The *Templar* could never throw that sort of swell."

Greg continued to watch but he could not see anything in the black canyon. After a while they rounded a point, crossed over, went on along the eastern shore.

"It will be after daylight before we get there," Greg said. "You'd better get some sleep."

It was still dark when the *Wanderer* turned into the long arm off Gardner Canal. Greg continued on to the head, entered a small lagoon and dropped the anchor. Ann was awake when he returned from the bow.

"There's a chance that Ben came over here," he said, "and it's hardly probable that Stanton knows of the cabin. I'm going ashore and look around. There may be a sign or signal of some sort. Ben and I had a lot of them when I was a kid."

"Why can't I go?" Ann asked when he had set the dinghy overboard.

"No reason," Greg said. "Hop in."

But he had taken his revolver and when he rowed toward shore he went stern first, pushing on the oars so that he could keep

watch ahead. After two hundred yards they entered a small stream.

"Ben's cabin is just around the bend," Greg said. "The trail to camp leaves——"

A roar as if a thousand rifles had been fired in that narrow cleft in the mountains drowned his words. For a moment they sat staring at each other.

"It was out in the bay!" Greg exclaimed, and he began to drive the dinghy swiftly down stream.

"The *Wanderer*!" Ann cried as they swept out into the bay. "She's gone!"

The pilot house alone showed, and in a moment it had disappeared beneath the surface. Greg stopped rowing and looked at Ann. Their faces were white and his hands trembled on the oars.

"But what——" Ann began.

"Gasoline," he answered. "One gas line passed near the water inlet. I probably hit the pipe with a wrench, working so fast with a poor light, and the gas leaked into the bilge. Then a spark, a loose connection somewhere——"

"But, Greg! If we had been aboard! Out in the channel!"

"It's luck."

"And now? We're so far from anywhere, with only this little boat."

"I'm not worried about that. We can get out, rowing along the shore. And Ben always kept some emergency rations in the cabin. I think," and he grinned, "that we'd better just be thankful we're on top of the water with whole hides."

Ann responded at once.

"Of course!" she cried. "Though I'm awfully sorry about your boat."

"She was a great little packet but we've a few other things to worry about, and the reason we came here was to find Ben."

HE ROWED back to the mouth of the stream and up around a bend. A small cabin of cedar shakes stood on the west bank and Greg ran eagerly to the door.

But the place was empty. He searched

inside and out but found no traces of the old woodsman having been there for a long time. Ann, looking inside, saw tins of corned beef, coffee and pilot bread and after Greg had built a fire she prepared breakfast.

"I'd counted on learning something here," Greg said as they sat down to the meal. "If Ben got away from camp by land, he would come to this cabin."

"Now what?"

"I'm going across the mountain and have a look at that cabin they have kept locked."

"Now listen!" the girl exclaimed. "I know how you feel—don't want me in danger and all that sort of thing. But I'd a lot rather go along than stay here."

Greg protested; she insisted, and at last they compromised by agreeing that she should go to the top of the mountain and wait for him.

"You say yourself Stanton won't be there," Ann said. "And if Uncle Ben is a prisoner in that cabin, I am just as anxious to find it out as you. I haven't seen him since he came west with your father, but he put me through school, supported me for years. I know now what it must have cost him. He's really the only parent I've ever known."

"We'll find him," Greg assured her. "We can't count on anything else. And he was too clever a woodsman for a bunch of city crooks to get the better of him. Let's start."

Ben and Greg might have called it a trail but Ann found the going most difficult. The underbrush was thick, the mountainside steep and broken.

"I haven't been off a sidewalk since I saw you last," she said apologetically.

"You used to go through the brush like an Indian," Greg laughed. "We'll take it easy."

He pretended to search for signs or messages and gave Ann opportunities to rest. A mile took them to the top of the mountain and then they went faster, at last emerging on a wide ledge.

"Careful," Greg cautioned. "If we crawl to the edge we can look right down on the camp."

A moment later they were peering through the brush. The buildings and camp lay almost beneath them.

"The *Templar's* gone!" Greg exclaimed. "I knew it would be. They've left."

They watched for a while but there was no indication of life about the place.

"Wait here," Greg said. "I'll have a look."

A half hour later Ann saw him at the edge of the clearing, where he lay watching. After a time he apparently was satisfied the camp was deserted, for he crept up behind the outbuildings to Ben's cabin. Then he opened a rear window and crawled in side.

Ann watched breathlessly. She, too, had come to the conclusion that her uncle was held prisoner there. Once when she had walked toward the building Dalquest had ordered her back to the house. From her bedroom window she had seen Stanton and Winn unlock the door and enter.

But now Greg emerged alone from the window. She could see him standing there evidently replacing everything as it was and then he went to the house, entered the kitchen door.

He was gone a long time. A light rain began to fall, little more than a mist. Clouds dropped lower down the mountainside until they enveloped the ledge in their chill folds, shut out all view of the camp beneath.

Ann's anxiety grew as time passed and Greg did not come. She knew the sort of Stanton and his companions were and as she waited she sat tensed for the sound of a shot. She was drenched now, very cold, began to wonder if she could find her way back across the mountain. And then Greg came, pushing through the wet brush.

"Ben's not there," he called. "No sign of him. Stanton's gone but not for good."

They didn't take a thing. Radio's there, and their bags and clothes."

"And there is no trace of Uncle Ben?"

"Nothing to indicate he had ever been there. I—I don't understand it."

It had been their last and only hope, and they had been so confident. Now, drenched, cold, despondent, they stood staring into the mist that covered the camp.

"No use staying here," Gregg said at last. "We'll go back, dry out and have something to eat."

IT WAS long past noon when they returned to Ben Wallace's trapping cabin. Greg built a fire and they stood close to the little stove while their clothing dried.

"Why did they have that door locked?" Ann asked.

"I don't know. I thought for a minute I had a line on what they're doing, until I saw how absurd it was. I thought they were counterfeiters."

"By why in such a place?"

"No need, and no one counterfeits silver coins on a big scale. I found these in Ben's cabin."

He drew from a pocket two pellets of metal of a shape taken when dropped molten.

"Some of the floor boards were scorched, as if by hot metal or coals," he continued. "And they had been working in there, though there were no melting pots and the like. And of course it's absurd, the counterfeiting idea. Stanton's game is a lot bigger."

"Did you go through their things?" Ann asked.

"Nothing but clothes. No letters, papers or stuff of that kind. I hoped I'd find a code for those songs. No, the place looks just as it's represented to be. Only, why are they coming back? Why did they let us go? Where are they now? What can men like that be doing in such a country? And Ben! I don't understand any of it."

It was raining harder now, beating on the thin roof of cedar shakes. Heavy mist swirled down the mountainsides. The luxuriant forest growth dripped ceaselessly. It was as dismal a place and day as Ann had ever known. When they had dried their clothes, cooked and eaten a meal, night had come.

"I'm going back to camp in the morning to have another look," Greg said.

"There's not enough food for tomorrow."

"That doesn't bother me. I can find Ross Shelby on the other side of the canal. He's a trapper, fisherman, hand logger, fur buyer, anything he takes a notion to be, and he's an old friend of Ben's and mine. He has a float house and even if he is away there will be food in it.

"But I've been thinking about Ben. There's another place or two I'd like to look, and I've got to make sure. I'll be back at noon, and then we'll find Ross."

It was still raining when Greg started early the next morning. Clouds clung to the mountainsides within two hundred feet of the water. Ann shivered as she thought of Greg climbing through the dripping brush.

At ten o'clock the drizzle ceased and the clouds began to lift. Ann went outside, down to the river, and it was there Greg found her when he burst out of the forest just before noon.

"Quick!" he called. "We've got to get to Ross Shelby's."

He dashed past her to the dinghy. His face was white, his voice husky. The girl was about to step into the boat when she stopped.

"Uncle Ben's dead," she said quietly.

"Murdered!" Greg cried savagely. "They shot him and he crawled away, up the mountain. They followed, tried to find him. Wanted to make sure. But even when he was wounded, Ben was too much for them. He hid his trail, and he left signals for me. He was trying to get over here.

Wait for me. He knew I'd come. Only —"

There were tears in Greg's eyes and he did not try to hide them. The shock and grief that had come to Ann were lessened by a sorrow which, she saw, was greater than her own could be. She remembered a kindly woodsman in the days of her childhood. Here was something different, something that brought tenderness.

"Please don't let my being here make any difference," she said. "Whatever you want to do—I'll wait here if necessary."

"No," Greg answered. "I'm not even sure Stanton is at camp. It's what I wanted to do first—go down there and run amuck."

"But how did you happen to find——"

"There's another trail from camp, to a lake in the mountains where there's wonderful trout fishing. There was a chance Ben may have taken that trail, intending to cut across to this cabin.

"I went along the mountain until I struck it, and in the first hundred feet I found one of our signs he had left. Stanton and the others had followed that far and beyond, had tramped back and forth a lot. But Ben fooled them. I found where he started this way. He left signs for me, things those city crooks never would have noticed. But after a while, crawling up that mountain—no water, not much hope, knowing he had sent for me and that I would come——"

AGAIN the tears came unchecked and Greg's voice failed him. He turned to the dinghy, shoved it into the water, motioned for Ann to get in. He rowed out of the cove before he spoke again.

"After I had started back here I heard a boat," he said. "Couldn't see because of the mist but it was a three-cylinder engine, like the *Templar's*. It ran just a minute or so, sounded as if it were down at camp."

"But Stanton wouldn't dare return!" Ann protested.

"I only hope he has!" Greg replied grimly. "And if Ross Shelby is home, his gas boat—I'll find Stanton before night."

They went out of the arm into the canal, down the shore and then across. Grey rowed steadily. Ben had taught that, to have something in reserve. At last they rounded a point.

"He's here!" Ann cried.

Greg glanced over a shoulder, then on the final spurt. Ann saw a little cabin built on a raft of logs. A gas boat was moored beside it. As they came nearer she heard music, and wires and a tall pole told her it was a radio.

A man was bending over something on a platform before the cabin. He came to the edge of the float as Greg rowed up and watched them. He was about thirty-five, long and thin. Ann liked him at once because of his smile. She, too, smiled when she saw the name painted on the stern of his gas boat, *Willing Slave*. She felt that here was the sort of man who would choose that sort of name, and she knew why Greg had come to him.

"Looks as if you'd run out of gas," Ross Shelby chuckled as the dinghy came alongside the float, and then he saw Greg's face and became silent.

He squatted there, holding the gunwale, not making a comment until Greg had finished. Then he turned and glanced significantly at the float behind him.

Greg saw it for the first time. Ross had removed almost the entire motor from the boat. The parts lay scattered about.

"How long?" Greg demanded.

"There wasn't much use o' my doing it," Ross stated apologetically. "She's been running so well I thought I'd sort o' like to see why. Was going over to visit Ben on Sunday. We might get her running in a few hours. When did you eat last?"

Greg told him. Ross led Ann into the cabin, waved to the stove and the table on board.

"Make it a good one," he said. "No telling when we'll get another chance. Shut that radio off if it bothers you. I generally let it dangle."

He returned to the float where Greg was already picking up parts and carrying them onto the gas boat.

"What's your idea?" he asked. "Go to Prince Rupert and notify the provincial police, or should you and me go over to the camp?"

"I'm going to the camp, and I want your rifle," Greg answered shortly.

"They're still there?"

"I'm only hoping so. Let's slam this together."

Ross Shelby's motions seemed slow, and he talked much, but he had that faculty of keeping his hands moving rapidly. Ann came out and called them to lunch.

"We'll be through soon," Greg said. "Don't wait for us."

"And shut off that radio if you ain't interested in raising chickens or pigs," Ross called after her. "I generally let her run," he said to Greg when she had gone. "Weather and kid stories and music and talks to farmers—queer bunch of stuff you get. I'll have to cut a new gasket for that forward cylinder."

They worked swiftly and intently for ten minutes. Then Ann's voice sent them leaping to the deck.

"Come quick! Both of you! Hurry! Hurry!"

CHAPTER IV

ROSS SHELBY jerked a rifle from the bulkhead, Greg Ives picked up a heavy end wrench, and both jumped to the float.

"In here!" Ann called from the cabin door. "Listen!"

She held a finger to her lips as they plunged inside and looked around the one small room.

"—chance of a lifetime for you hand

loggers and fishermen far up the sparsely populated coast of British Columbia," came in an excited voice from the loud speaker.

"They stopped a song to tell it," Ann whispered.

"But what—" Greg began, and then the voice resumed.

"Two tons of gold! Think of it, if you can! Four thousand pounds of the precious yellow metal! The value is a million and a quarter dollars. That is what was stolen from the Arctic Line Steamship *Pacific* right in your main street, you hand loggers and fishermen along the inside passage to Alaska."

Greg and Ann looked at each other, their eyes flashing thoughts, but no one spoke.

"In modern times piracy has become practically unknown, except in China and the Malay peninsula. Civilization has made the seven seas safe. Thousands of tourists have traveled to Alaska and millions upon millions in gold have been brought out, but there has been no known instance of anything except petty theft. Now, like a thunderbolt, a gang of desperate, clever criminals captures a big liner, kills the captain and two others, maroons the vessel at the head of a long, little known arm of the sea, far back amid the towering peaks of the coast range, and escapes with its booty—two tons of gold.

"We have no more details now. News of this astounding robbery has just been flashed to civilization by a Canadian passenger steamship. The steamship *Pacific* was captured Monday night. Tuesday morning the pirates escaped with their loot. It was not until noon today, Wednesday, that the *Pacific's* crew was able to communicate with the outside world.

"This station, KIKA, Seattle, Washington, has been asked by the authorities to broadcast the news at once. It is recognized that the robbery occurred in the center of a coastline of several hundred miles along which there are no towns and no means

of communication other than bi-monthly mail. But because so many of the few inhabitants have radio sets, we have been asked to spread the news as quickly and to as remote districts as possible.

"The police, both of Canada and the States, ask that you be on the alert for strange craft of any kind, that if you see strangers or anyone acting in a suspicious manner you communicate at once with the nearest police. If you have anything important, don't hesitate to stop any ship you may see along the inside passage and ask the captain to communicate your information by wireless. The authorities put it up to us to spread the news. We put it up to you to apprehend this band of daring criminals. No need to tell you the reward will be great.

"Meanwhile, please stand by. We will broadcast further information as quickly as it is received."

THE voice ceased. Ann and Greg looked at each other, again their eyes flashing thoughts too swiftly for utterance.

"Anyhow," Ross Shelby drawled, "that seems to answer your questions as to what Stanton and his gang were up to. Ben must 'a' learned too much."

"But why—" Ann cried in sudden terror, "Why did he let us go?"

"They captured the ship Monday night," Greg explained. "Remember your seeing the lights of a ship go out? Stanton knew it would take us twelve hours to reach Prince Rupert, the nearest police, and then it would be too late."

"But how could three men stop a liner?" Ross demanded. "And you say the other two left early."

"There were others," Ann said. "The signal over the radio Sunday night explains that."

"And soon after the ship's lights went out we felt a big swell," Greg added. "The *Pacific* was passing us, running dark and—Good Lord! It must be the head of

Gardner Canal where they marooned her.

"Sure!" Ross laughed. "Everything's been happening in our front yard, like the radio fellow said, and we never knew it. There's one thing about it, though. You never heard Mr. Stanton and his boat at camp this morning. He's as far away from here as he can get and going faster every minute."

"Then we've got to get your motor together, bust down to Wright Sound and stop the first ship that passes!" Greg exclaimed as he started toward the door. "I don't care about the gold, but Stanton and his gang killed Ben and the sooner we get a description of him to the police the better chance we have of seeing him hung."

"I'll call you as soon as there's anything new," Ann said as Ross followed Greg back to the gas boat.

The two worked in swift silence for few minutes and then Ross spoke.

"I've had that set a year," he chuckled. "I know all about it, how it works and all, and it's got to be as familiar as the cooking stove. But in a time like this I'm just flabbergasted. This thing happens within a few miles of us, and in a couple of hours Seattle tells us all about it. Why, I was up Gardner Canal in '14 and it was the end of September before I knew the war had started."

"They got the signal over the radio Sunday night that the gold was on the *Pacific*," Greg said, "so the thing works both ways. That's something else the police will be glad to know."

"What time yesterday did you see the *Templar* at camp?"

"She was gone yesterday but about eleven this forenoon I heard her from the top of the ridge. A friend of mine once owned her and I was sure I knew the 'potato', 'potato' of her exhaust."

"A lot of boats have three-cylinder engines and you can't tell me Stanton's hanging around here. Shellac that gaske and we'll get the cylinders on."

The motor occupied their entire attention for a time, and then Ann called. They rushed into the cabin just as the Seattle announcer began another account.

"WE CAN now give you a fairly complete story of the British Columbia coast robbery. The steamship *Pacific* of the Arctic line left Skagway, Alaska, on its usual return voyage Saturday. It carried nearly a full quota of passengers, mostly tourists, and made the usual stops at Juneau, Wrangell and Ketchikan, taking on a few passengers at each town and, from Ketchikan, sailing directly for Seattle.

"Monday evening at eight o'clock the *Pacific*, then south of Prince Rupert, British Columbia, reported her position by wireless, as customary. Tuesday evening at the same time she should have reported from the Gulf of Georgia, off Nanaimo or Vancouver, and she should have docked in Seattle at six o'clock this, Wednesday, morning.

"No concern was felt in the Seattle offices of the company until nine o'clock this morning, when wireless calls to the *Pacific* had not been answered. The company then sent wireless messages to Alert Bay, British Columbia, and to all steamships on the Alaskan run. These brought replies that the *Pacific* had not been sighted. The reports also stated that the weather had been clear, which added to the mystery. Even had the ship run aground in one of the narrow channels, there would have been plenty of time to notify the outside world by wireless. Only some appalling and mysterious disaster could account for the sudden and complete disappearance of the *Pacific*.

"A search was immediately begun but it had hardly gotten under way when, at noon today, a message from the Canadian Steamship *Emperor*, bound for Vancouver from Alaskan and northern British Columbia ports, cleared up the mystery.

"When crossing Wright Sound, and

near the east end the *Emperor*, which had just received a notification of the disappearance of the *Pacific* and was maintaining a lookout for her as it sailed over the *Pacific's* course, sighted a ship's lifeboat coming out of an arm of the sound on the north side. The boat signalled and rowed desperately until the *Emperor* slowed down. Soon it was alongside and when its occupants were aboard they told a story more amazing than any that has come down from the North Pacific coast.

"Monday night at ten o'clock, when the *Pacific* was in the center of Wright Sound, six masked men, appearing suddenly and simultaneously on the bridge, in the engine room and other advantageous points, took over control of the ship. The ruthless nature of the pirates was at once made evident. Captain John Thorpe, a veteran of the Alaskan run, was just leaving the bridge. When ordered to put up his hands the old seaman bluntly refused and ordered the pirate from the bridge. The pirate fired instantly, with both automatics, and the captain crumpled at his feet.

"In the saloon a young man, a passenger, tried to escape and was shot down. An oiler in the engine room endeavored to slip away and was killed. The bodies of these three men were left where they fell as reminders of what might be expected and it was thus that six men gained complete control over several hundred passengers and a crew of more than a hundred.

"The passengers were ordered to their staterooms, the crew herded into their quarters and guards stationed. Tourists, expecting to be robbed, hid money and jewelry beneath rugs and mattresses but all the bandits demanded were the keys to the staterooms. The doors were immediately locked and the keys tossed overboard.

"Meanwhile, every precaution was taken to prevent communication with the outside world. The wireless room was completely

wrecked. Then two pirates went down the boat deck and scuttled every lifeboat aboard the *Pacific*. As soon as the ship was seized all lights, even the legal running lights, were extinguished. Only in the engine room, beneath the water line, was illumination permitted.

"Two bandits stood guard on the bridge. One took the third officer, who was on watch, into the chart room and indicated on a chart that he wished the ship taken to the head of Gardner Canal, a long arm of the sea that reaches far back into the heart of the coast range, between lofty, snow-clad mountains that are almost bare of vegetation, a place described as grimly beautiful but desolate and awesome. Except for a few Indians near the lower end, the canal is uninhabited.

"The *Pacific* reached the head at dawn. Immediately a small fishing boat of the type known as a purse seiner emerged from a cove and came alongside. The pirates had already driven half a dozen of the crew to the task of transporting the two tons of gold from the purser's office to the forward deck and now a winchman was compelled to lower the precious burden into the hold of the small craft.

"Everyone aboard the *Pacific* was locked below decks, the pirates descended the Jacob's ladder to the purse seiner and soon disappeared around a bend in the inlet. When the chief mate escaped from his room he called the chief engineer on the telephone and learned that, after the ship was anchored, the bandits had compelled the engine room staff to remove the covers of the valve chests and pour in molten babbit metal, thereby putting the engines out of commission for several days.

"The *Pacific* was now seventy miles from the inside passage, anchored amid towering mountains, her wireless wrecked, her boats stove in, her engines useless. The chief mate immediately set the ship's carpenter to work on the least damaged of the lifeboats but it was after noon before the

craft was ready. Manned by volunteers the lifeboat struggled down the inlet against a head wind and in a drenching rain, being rowed all night and the next forenoon before reaching Wright Sound and sighting the *Emperor*.

"The two tons of gold stolen by the pirates was fresh from the mines of the Klondike. It was taken aboard at Skagway for shipment to the San Francisco mint. No one except the officers of the ship knew it was aboard. Steamship officials in Seattle stated that they had not been advised the *Pacific* was to bring out so precious a cargo. Government authorities immediately notified, declared the plot must have been long and carefully planned by a large gang of clever criminals. They pointed out the fact that, though the steamship company did not know the *Pacific* was to transport the gold, part of the pirate crew, waiting at the head of a little known inlet, far from wireless or other means of communication, was on hand when the ship arrived.

"Details are still meager. It is only three hours ago that the *Emperor* picked up the *Pacific's* boat. Until police and other officials reach the scene, little can be learned. Meanwhile, both Canadian and United States authorities are spreading a net across each end of the inside passage to Alaska. Every craft of every size and description will be stopped and searched. The British Columbia Provincial Police, the Royal Canadian Mounted, operatives from the United States Department of Justice and the United States Coast Guard, all were on the job an hour after the news was received.

"Between Alert Bay, at the north end of Vancouver Island, and Prince Rupert, British Columbia, a distance of more than three hundred miles, there are no wireless stations, no means of communication except by water. In this long and intricate stretch of coast line there are scattered

hand loggers, fishermen and a number of salmon canneries, a majority of whom have radio sets. It is hoped that in thus disseminating so quickly the news of the great gold robbery, clues may be gathered and forwarded to the authorities.

"Please keep tuned in on this station for further developments. Large rewards undoubtedly will be offered, not only by the two Governments concerned but by the insurance and steamship companies."

THE radio was silent. Ross looked at the other two.

"There's a lot you can tell the police," he chuckled, "and the sooner you tell it the better. Let's get busy."

He and Greg dashed back to the gas boat and resumed their work.

"I'll move the radio aboard," Ross said. "Everything's ready to hook up."

"They'll never get Stanton!" Greg exclaimed fiercely. "He and his gang left the *Pacific* at the head of Gardner Canal yesterday morning early. They've had more than thirty hours start."

"The *Templar* hasn't any speed, has it?"

"They'll not depend on that. Look how long they've planned this, and how well. Everything went like clock work. And they've spent money, leasing the camp, buying the *Templar*, waiting up here. After they've done all that they won't use an eight-knot boat to get out."

"They'd need some speed," Ross said. "It's between five and six hundred miles from the head of the canal to Seattle. They couldn't make it before this leaked unless they did thirty knots."

"Then Stanton'll do thirty knots. How about it? She ready?"

The motor caught on the first revolution, settled to steady running. Ross brought the radio set from the float house, installed it in the *Willing Slave*. Ann carried the lunch aboard, lines were cast off, and they were away.

CHAPTER V

"THE nearest provincial police are in Prince Rupert," Ross said as he turned out of the cove. "Starting as soon as that report got out, they couldn't get here before twelve or one o'clock tonight."

"Meeting them won't get us anywhere," Greg objected. "They won't have wireless. We've got to stop a ship. Stanton's been on the way thirty-six hours now."

"Here's the radio with more news," Ann called from the cabin.

"Listen, you hand loggers and fishermen up the British Columbia coast!" came the announcer's excited voice. "The method by which the pirates who stole two tons of gold from the Steamship *Pacific* were able to communicate with their confederates aboard the purse seine boat which carried the loot away has been discovered.

"A young man known as Willis Lavery appeared in Ketchikan six weeks ago and soon obtained a position singing in the Ketchikan broadcasting station. He was engaged for a few nights only but became so popular with the Alaskan radio fans he was kept on.

"One stipulation he made was that he was to select his own programs. He chose his songs but did not announce them until he began to sing. The studio made no objections because of his popularity.

"The possibility of Lavery's part in the piracy was seen when his sudden disappearance was connected with news of the gold robbery. It is known now that he sailed on the *Pacific* when it left Ketchikan. It has been discovered that he received a telegram from Skagway late Saturday night. This is believed to have been a code message telling him the gold was aboard the *Pacific*. Sunday night, his last appearance before the Ketchikan microphone, he sang a group of songs of thirty years ago, and these, it is thought, carried

a code message to the purse seine boat in Gardner Canal.

"Steamship officials in Ketchikan stated that only two passengers boarded the *Pacific* at that port. Several men saw Lavery go up the gangplank. The story of the piracy was brought out by the lifeboat's crew and relayed by the *Emperor*, states that two of the pirates boarded the ship at Skagway, two at Juneau and two at Ketchikan. Please stand by, British Columbia coast listeners, for further reports."

"Nothing startling in that," Greg commented. "We knew it days ago, didn't we, Ann?"

The radio began again.

"A steamship has reported by wireless that it sighted a purse seine boat just off Wright Sound," the announcer said. "It investigated, found the boat, which bore the name *Skeena*, the same as that reported by the *Pacific*, to be drifting without a crew. Signs of the heavy boxes of gold being scraped across the deck were found.

"This has convinced the authorities that the gold was transhipped to another vessel, probably a fast one. It has been pointed out that from five o'clock Tuesday morning, when the purse seiner left the *Pacific*, until this afternoon, when the first news of the piracy reached the outside world, thirty-two hours elapsed. A fast boat could have reached Vancouver or even the States coast in time to permit the pirates to escape with their loot before the robbery became known. The authorities think this may have happened and a land as well as a sea net is being spread.

"Those in close touch with the situation believe it barely possible that the criminals will be apprehended or the two tons of gold recovered. It is pointed out that a robbery so thoroughly planned would not be put through unless equally careful attention had been given to the escape. It is thought that every arrangement was made and that the pirates were safe ashore in

Puget Sound and the two tons of gold securely hidden before the pursuit started."

THERE was silence for a moment and then Ross said, "That doesn't sound so good."

"Probably not much use in our getting word out to the police now," Greg added dejectedly. "Unless we give a description of Stanton and the other two. That would help."

"Of course it will!" Ann insisted. "What are the chances of our catching a ship with wireless?"

Ross found some steamship folders and estimated the probable time for Alaskan liners to pass through Wright Sound.

"Nothing for a day or two," he said. "A freighter would do. We'd better hang around Kingcome Point for one."

They were near the entrance to the canal now. Greg's camp lay seven miles ahead, around a point. They would pass it about five o'clock, reach Kingcome Point an hour and a half later.

A woman was singing over the radio and her song was broken off in the middle of a word. Ann and Greg dashed below and Ross hung onto the wheel and leaned down the hatch to listen.

"While the police have not yet reached the scene of the crime, though fast craft of all kinds are bearing them there swiftly, both Canadian and United States authorities are convinced that neither the gold stolen from the *Pacific* nor the criminals themselves will ever be seen again by human eyes," the announcer said.

"Justice swifter than their ill-fated craft, death like a thunderbolt frustrating their most carefully laid plans, these have brought a startling climax to the most daring robbery ever known in the west coast of this continent.

"When the steamship *Edward VII* reached Vancouver early this morning it brought a story of a grim tragedy of the sea that, later, no one at first associated

with the robbery. Tuesday evening the *Edward VII*, Vancouver-bound from Alaskan and northern British Columbia ports, was approaching Seymour Narrows in Johnstone Straits. At seven o'clock officers and a few passengers of the *Edward*, which is a fast ship, saw a small boat rapidly overtaking it.

"This craft, which was described as an enormous hydroplane, a boat fifty or more feet long, built much like the tiny racing machines and evidently driven by two or more powerful motors, sped past the *Edward* as if the latter were standing still. Passengers crowded the rails and officers watched from the bridge. The speed boat had an enclosed cabin but the figures of several men could be seen through the port holes. Skilled navigators estimated the craft was making at least thirty knots.

"In a few minutes the mysterious boat was a mile ahead of the *Edward VII*. Captain Marston of the *Edward* still had his glasses trained upon it when suddenly an explosion occurred. After smoke and spray cleared away, the swift craft was gone. Captain Marston could see a few pieces of wreckage.

"He immediately signalled his engine room and the *Edward* came to a stop near the scene of the explosion. A boat had already been lowered and the waters were searched for a possible survivor. One was found, a young man clinging to part of the cabin. He was barely conscious and has not recovered consciousness since. A piece of planking was picked up with the name '*Careless, Seattle*,' painted upon it.

"Inquiry developed that the *Careless* was once a famous and successful rum-runner, plying out of Seattle. She was owned by Matty McGill and was known as a boat that had never been caught, not only because of her great speed but because McGill withdrew her when the coast guard began to be effective. He readily admitted he had used the boat in the liquor trade but said he had sold it two months ago. Cus-

toms records bore him out. The new owner was shown to be Harry Dalquest of New York.

"The explosion on the speed boat was known hours before a report came in of the gold robbery. No reason for the presence of such a craft in Johnstone Straits could be found. Liquor is not run into the States from those waters. The sole survivor was unconscious in a Vancouver hospital. There was no record of the boat having officially entered Canadian waters.

"Later the police began connecting the two events. Matty McGill said that when he owned the *Careless* it was capable of better than forty miles an hour and had a sustained cruising speed of thirty. It is a little less than six hundred miles from the head of Gardner Canal to Seattle. Leaving early Tuesday morning, the speed boat could have reached Seattle before daylight Wednesday morning and, traveling at thirty knots, it would have reached the place in Johnstone Straits where sighted by the *Edward VII* at the time of the explosion.

"When the authorities had checked these facts they expressed no doubt but that the gold and the pirate crew trans-shipped from the purse seiner, which they probably had stolen, to the speed boat, and that now the two tons of gold and the bodies of the criminals lie in the bottom of Johnstone Straits, beneath swirling currents and one hundred fathoms of water. The unconscious man in the Vancouver hospital is believed to be the sole survivor of the pirate gang, and physicians say that he cannot live.

"Matty McGill pointed out that so large a boat, traveling at such speed across the open ocean in Queen Charlotte Sound and down Johnstone Straits, which are always rough for small craft, would be subjected to terrific pounding. He said a gas tank connection or gas line might easily be jarred loose or broken, thereby filling the bilge with gasoline, when an electric spark

or a match would have caused the explosion that wrecked the craft.

"McGill also informed the authorities that when he sold the boat to the man known as Dalquest he was asked to recommend a pilot. McGill said Dalquest made it plain he wanted someone who would step far outside the law and so put him in touch with a man known as Jack Winn. The police say Winn is the most notorious hijacker who has ever operated in Puget Sound waters."

THE voice over the radio ceased and the three people aboard the *Willing Slave* looked at each other without speaking for a moment.

"You doped out Mr. Stanton pretty well, Greg, only you didn't go quite far enough," Ross said at last. "Looks like the captain of the *Pacific* and Ben and the other two had the score evened up in a hurry. Our job's done."

Greg did not answer at once but stood staring down the channel.

"It doesn't sound right to me!" he burst forth suddenly. "I was sure I heard the *Templar's* motor this morning. And Stanton—there's a catch in this somewhere."

"Bulletin, folks!" the radio interrupted. "Word has just been received that the sole survivor of the explosion on the *Careless* has died in a Vancouver hospital without having regained consciousness. The police had already taken his thumbprints and these identify him as Harry Dalquest wanted in several cities in the East for participation in big pay roll and mail robberies. His description tallies with that of the man who purchased the *Careless* from Matty McGill."

"The police now have no doubt but that the last of the pirates and the last of the gold have been seen. Had it not been for the explosion, the *Careless*, it has been estimated, would have arrived in Seattle before dawn this morning and the pirates would have had ample time to dispose of

their loot and secrete themselves. They planned with amazing cunning, they took care of every detail. It would have been extremely difficult if not impossible to apprehend them.

"But fate stepped in, justice lifted the bandage from her eyes, and the very force which was speeding the robbers and their loot to safety blew them to eternity."

The radio was silent. Ross turned to Greg with a grin.

"Does that settle it for you?" he asked.

"What can the police in Seattle or Vancouver tell about it?" Greg retorted. "They don't even know about Stanton, who's been the brains of the whole thing. I'll leave it to Ann. She was with him four days. Does this sound right to you?"

"It doesn't," she answered quickly, "though I haven't a single thing to back up my feeling so."

"It's easy to see how it all worked," Ross scoffed. "The only thing for Stanton and his bunch to do was to get out of the country before the robbery was known. They tried it and——"

"And what?" Greg interrupted sharply.

"Gas in the bilge, a spark off the track. The wisest planning in the world can't beat that sort of thing."

"Camp's on the way to Kingcome Point," Greg said. "We'll stop and see if the *Templar's* there."

Ross turned the wheel slightly in agreement. The channel now stretched far before them, like a great river between lofty mountain ranges. Greg, silent, continued to stare ahead. Suddenly he reached for the glasses.

"Look!" he shouted. "There's the *Templar* just putting out from camp."

Ross and Ann could see the white hull without binoculars.

"I did hear it this forenoon!" Greg exclaimed. "And Stanton isn't dead. He's only three miles from us, and you can bet he's got the gold."

"You're crazy!" Ross retorted. "It's somebody else. What would Stanton be hanging around these waters for when they'll be full of police boats tomorrow?"

"I know the *Templar* when I see it," Greg answered excitedly. "And listen here! Have you seen anything strange in the fact that two boats blew up, the *Careless* and the *Wanderer*? Have you thought that Stanton was present when both started out?"

"What are you driving at?"

"You remember Dalquest telling Stanton he wanted to know things were jake last night at dinner?" and Greg turned to Ann. "Did you know what he meant?"

"He wanted to know we were safe, which was his way of saying 'dead.'"

"Yes, and Stanton told him everything was jake as long as he was running the show. Now another point. I've wondered about it several times. Stanton wasn't gone long enough Monday night to disconnect the water pipe and put that plug in. It was done by Winn and Dalquest as soon as I arrived, while I was fixing the oil burner in the kitchen."

"Stanton went to his room before he went out the front door," Ann added.

"Of course! But what for? Ross, did you ever see a boat after a gasoline explosion? Did you ever hear of one sinking right away? The worst it usually does is rip off the top of the cabin. But the *Wanderer* and the *Careless* were torn to pieces and sank at once."

"Stanton wasn't anywhere near the *Wanderer* when she blew up," Ross objected.

"He didn't have to be. He went to his room for it while we were washing dishes that last night in camp—a time bomb. Can't you see it? And now, after getting the news over the radio that Dalquest is dead, he leaves in the *Templar*, thinking there is no one alive who knows of the robbery."

CHAPTER VI

ROSS SHELBY laughed at Greg's explanation, but Ann leaned across the hatch combing with dancing eyes.

"Of course that's it!" she cried. "Everything points to it."

"Mean to tell me he blew up his own boat and his own men?" Ross scoffed.

"Why not?" Greg demanded. "The fewer men who knew, the less chance of his being caught. And see what the police think already. He's waiting up here, playing the big game hunter and fisherman but sitting on the gold. The men in the speed boat could see it was a smart game but they didn't see how smart it could be."

"And now, with the radio telling him Dalquest is dead, and thinking we are, he feels he's safe," Ann added.

"But why did he take a chance on letting you go?" Ross objected. "You're guessing all this."

"We're not!" Ann cried. "Why would he have rented the camp? Why should he have bought the *Templar*? Why wouldn't he have made sure of Greg and me by killing us that last day if he hadn't been planning to remain after the robbery? He'd not want clues of that sort around."

"And he wouldn't let Dalquest know he intended to use a time bomb on us because he was planning to kill Dalquest and the others with one," Greg added. "And who would be aboard the *Templar*, taking her away from camp, but Stanton?"

"I don't know," Ross admitted, "but it sounds foolish to me. If I'd stolen two tons of gold I wouldn't hang around with it."

"That's the reason Stanton is no ordinary criminal," Greg said. "The robbery itself is unusual, something new. On the face of it, the police have the right dope. Marooning the *Pacific* and escaping in a speed boat before the robbery became known is the ordinary clever way to pull

such a stunt. But it wasn't safe. Chances of a boat traveling six hundred miles at thirty knots without a breakdown are slim, and a breakdown meant they were caught.

"But if Stanton established himself in camp as a fisherman and big game hunter, if all the others were killed by the explosion on the *Careless*, if the police believed that ended the pirates and the gold, there should be no reason whatever for suspecting him just because he happened to be within sixty miles of where the gold was stolen."

"You two dropping in must have given him a jolt," Ross laughed.

"Of course it did. Ben tried to get away and there wasn't anything else but shoot. But murder isn't an easy thing to cover up and Stanton felt sure we would strike for Prince Rupert, the nearest town. He timed the bomb so that we would be eighty or ninety miles from camp when it went off. That would leave him clear."

"It all fits together, now that we understand!" Ann exclaimed.

"May be so," Ross said without conviction. "It sounds fishy to me. But what if it is so?"

All three looked at the *Templar*, now nearly four miles ahead of them down the channel.

"If he planned all you say, intended to pose as a sportsman, what's he leaving now for?" Ross insisted.

"I don't know," Greg admitted, "but it doesn't make much difference. We've got to follow and find out."

"What can the *Templar* do?"

"The best she ever did is eight and a half knots. She cruises a little short of eight."

"And the *Slave* can do an even seven if I crowd her."

Ross ducked below and adjusted carburetor and spark. The gas boat shook with increased vibration and the bow wave became bigger.

"Whether it's true or not, what you're

guessing, there's nothing for us to do but see what he's up to now," the Canadian said when he returned to the pilot house.

ALL three watched the *Templar* for a time.

"Taking this channel, he's headed for Seattle," Greg said.

"Then he hasn't the gold aboard," Ross insisted. "Even if it is Stanton, he wouldn't be fool enough to try that. Being a big game hunter and all that isn't going to get him past a search."

"But how can we ever catch him?" Ann cried. "He'll get farther and farther ahead."

"We can only keep after him and stop the first ship that has a wireless," Greg said. "He can't get away. All sorts of boats loaded with police will be coming north from Seattle and Vancouver."

"What's he hugging the west shore for?" Ross asked after a moment. "See! He's turning west now. He's not going to Seattle."

As all three watched, the *Templar* disappeared around a point.

"That's queer!" Greg exclaimed in a puzzled tone. "If he had been going to Prince Rupert he would have taken Verney Passage."

"We can gain a bit by getting the last of the ebb in the center," Ross said.

"We don't want to get closer now. He won't suspect us up here but if we turn and follow he might."

They kept on for more than half an hour before reaching the point where the *Templar* had disappeared. There, as they drifted out with clutch released, they saw Stanton's boat turning south at a point far to the west.

"He's taking Whale Channel!" Ross exclaimed. "Out to sea!"

"I can't make anything of that," Greg said. "Open her up."

Another forty minutes passed, and when the *Willing Slave* turned out of Wright

Sound into Whale Channel the *Templar* was five miles in the lead.

"Suppose he's headed for Seattle down the open ocean?" Ross asked.

"Won't he be seen down there?" Ann objected.

"Seen!" Ross laughed. "He's headed for the loneliest stretch of coast in North America. Here's the inside passage to Alaska, with ships and any number of small boats passing day and night, and right around the point ahead of him—well, he might as well jump off the edge of the earth."

Ann looked across Wright Sound to the west, back in McKay Reach to the east. Not a craft of any sort was in sight.

"Don't you see what this does to us?" she cried. "The whole responsibility is ours now."

"You mean——" Greg began.

"Believing what they do, the police think all the pirates and the gold are at the bottom of Johnstone Straits," she rushed on. "We're the only people in the world who know Stanton had anything to do with it, or that the gold isn't lost. If there were only a ship!"

Again she searched the empty channels lying between the mountain ranges.

"We might wait here two days," Greg said quietly. "In two days he could get anywhere."

Ross looked at them, one hand gripping a spoke in a manner suggesting that a half turn would direct the gas boat wherever they decided.

"Oh, we can't let him get away!" Ann cried in a tone so fierce the men stared in amazement.

THEN Greg nodded; Ross gave the wheel a twist, and they rounded Nellie Point, left the inside passage behind them, took up the pursuit of the pirate craft.

The tide had turned and the flood had already gathered strength. Ross kept close to the eastern shore to catch the eddy in a

big bight. Also, because the *Willing Slave* was painted a drab gray, it would not be seen against the beach.

The sun had set and the long twilight had begun. Deep shadows crept out from beneath the western shore. A high fog was driving in from the open sea. Greg measured distances on the chart, looked at his watch.

"Stanton won't try to go past Barnard Cove tonight," he said. "It will be dark by the time he reaches it."

He glanced significantly at Ross and after a moment the Canadian went below, where he examined the rifle and shotgun that hung in leather loops on the cabin bulkhead. Greg tried to stand in the companionway so that Ann would not see but she caught the click of the bolt action.

"What are you planning to do?" she asked quietly.

"I wish we had left you at Ross's float house!" Greg exclaimed. "I never knew, never thought——"

He broke short off, suddenly realizing how little he had thought of some things in the swift rush of the past four days. He had been aware that Ann's spirit was indomitable. That was flamingly evident from the first, when they had been Stanton's prisoners together, when they had escaped, when her uncle's body had been found.

Now, for the first time, he saw that spirit in its true perspective, wondered how many girls could have passed through such an experience and then stand before him and ask quietly, "What are you planning to do?"

"If we had only left you!" he exclaimed in sudden agony at the thought of subjecting her to further danger. "We can't take you into this!"

She looked at him steadily, her eyes glowing.

"Don't you realize that it works both ways?" she asked with a little smile. "I can't let you go into this, either, Greg. But

we're going, together. Anything else——"

She still smiled, but her eyes were wet. Swiftly he bent and kissed her.

"We can't stop now!" she cried. "That beast, Stanton! He mustn't get away! We could never be happy if he did."

Ross came on deck and looked ahead.

"Stanton's not going into Barnard Cove!" he exclaimed. "He's turning west!"

Greg lifted the glasses.

"You're right," he said after a moment. "He's keeping on, going out to sea."

"Or down the coast."

Ross did not look at the chart. There was not a mile of those intricate and little traversed waterways with which he was not perfectly familiar. Much of it was uncharted or sketchily surveyed. The shores bristled with outlying dangers. In many places it was open to the Pacific. Swift currents ran in the narrow passages. It was no place for a stranger to be blundering about in the dark.

"If he goes down there, in the night, a whole navy couldn't find him!" Ross exclaimed.

All three watched the white speck down the channel. The high mountains threw black shadows across the water. After a moment the *Templar* disappeared around a point to the west, headed for the maze of islands, inlets and narrow passages, or for the open sea.

CHAPTER VII

THE *Willing Slave* pushed on in the gathering darkness.

"If we could only work this radio backwards," Ross said after a while, "send a message with it. The darned thing has told us too much. If we'd thought Stanton hadn't done any more than kill Ben, we'd keep poking along after him and trust to knowing these waters so much better than he does that we'd find him."

"That's what we've got to do now," Greg broke in.

"But this two tons of gold! If he was only making a get-away it would be easy. He's going to have the gold on his mind. No telling what he'll do."

"And when morning comes—a mile farther ahead of us every hour!" Ann exclaimed in dismay.

"I'm not worrying about that," Ross said. "There's a lot in working the tides. He stayed in the middle, bucking the flood, and we hunted the eddies. He hasn't gained much since we first sighted him. The point is, where's he headed? Once around that point, he can go in any one of half a dozen directions, and when we get there it will be too dark to see."

The three stood in the pilot house and said nothing for a time. Then Ross chuckled.

"You've been so good at doping out what Mr. Stanton thinks, why don't you work this one out?" he asked.

"Get your chart and I'll show you!" Greg retorted.

There was no mistaking the triumph in his voice. He reached for Ann's hand and clutched it, thumped Ross on the back.

"I know exactly where he is going!" he laughed.

"I suppose he told you," Ross scoffed.

"No; I told him. The little white bears!"

"Oh, Greg! You've got it!" Ann cried. "That—why that completes the picture!"

"Did he say he'd wait there for you?" Ross asked as he unrolled a chart. "You're either plain crazy or smarter than a detective in a book."

"You would understand it if you had been with Stanton," Ann said. "Things that puzzled us then are perfectly clear now."

"But what about the little white bears?"

"Stanton wants to kill one or two and capture a pair alive."

"Which will make more trouble for him when he goes out," Ross jeered. "This is closed season."

"Getting a white bear is the only thing Stanton talked to me about," Greg ex-

plained. "I thought at first it was to throw me off the track but now that we know he intended to kill Ann and me we see that wasn't necessary. And he didn't try to deceive us in any other way."

"I thought he really wanted to know when he asked those questions, and I couldn't understand it," Ann interrupted.

"He did want to know," Greg insisted. "Oh, this ties the whole thing up! He got a special permit from the province to take specimens for a zoo and a museum. He stopped in Victoria to see the white bear in the city park. But when we came he hadn't gone after a bear."

"Of course not," Ross said. "What was the use? He'd made his little play."

"But he hadn't made it. He was saving it. The *Pacific* is captured, the gold taken, the speed boat blown up, the pirates are killed. Ann and I are, too, except for a piece of luck that Stanton doesn't know about. The police think gold and criminals are gone forever. The radio tells him so.

"So what does Stanton do? He runs down to Princess Royal Island in the *Templar*. He goes ashore, maybe blazes a trail. He fixes up the *Templar's* log. He could claim he arrived last week, before the piracy. And when he gets his bear he can go back to camp, do a little trout fishing and then cruise down the coast in the *Templar*. Or, with a live bear, he can rush out, hurrying to get it to the zoo. Playing that game, he would never be suspected."

"You make it sound good," Ross admitted, "but there's still the two tons of gold. You can't very well mistake gold for something else and even a white bear isn't going to get him past a search when he goes out."

"I haven't gone that far," Ross admitted, "but any man who is clever enough to plan the rest of it has provided for getting the gold out safely. Anyhow, it's Stanton, not the gold, we're after."

"But why did Stanton stay at the camp

until late this afternoon?" Ross asked. "That don't fit in."

"To get the news over the radio," Ann answered quickly. "He left right after the news of Dalquest's death was broadcast."

"Sure!" Greg added. "And yesterday and this morning he was hiding the gold aboard the *Templar*."

ROSS laughed, changed the course slightly to avoid the last of the flood tide.

"I'll admit it sounds good," he said, "all except the gold part of it. But as you say, it's Stanton we're after. Where did you tell him to go?"

"Laredo Inlet."

"Good place for him. It's not charted or surveyed and he'd have it to himself. No one would ever go poking in there looking for a pirate. We'll bust right through, but if he sails all night he's liable to get into trouble. Let's set some watches and work in a little sleep while we can."

All three studied the chart first, in the light of a flash.

"Right in the center of Princess Royal Island!" Ann exclaimed. "Of course he would go there."

"Farthest away and hardest to reach," Ross agreed. "Best place to get a white bear, too."

Dawn found the *Willing Slave* crossing the north end of Laredo Sound. There was no sign of the *Templar* ahead or astern nor, when the long reach of Laredo Inlet lay before them, was it to be seen. All day the *Willing Slave* chugged steadily along, into every arm, bay and tiny cove, up the west shore, down the east. At dark they were back again at the entrance, assured that Stanton was not in the inlet.

They anchored, were off again early the next morning, searching the water as they retraced their course in Laredo Channel.

"I spoke about Surf Inlet, too," Greg said, "and the two arms near it. They lead back into the mountains."

The radio told nothing new. An investi-

gation in Seattle had failed to disclose additional facts. No word had been received from the several vessels rushed to the scene of the piracy, nor was hope held out that they would discover anything of value.

There are a number of small, uncharted inlets south of Surf Inlet into which they poked. Surf Inlet itself has two long arms. Night same as they finished the second and crossed to another inlet northwest. The entrance was partially blocked by a group of small islands and reefs and among these they anchored.

"He's in here or we never find him," Ross said after he had stopped the motor.

They did not look at the chart, and a stranger would have needed only a glance to know the hopelessness of finding a small boat along that stretch of coast line. For a hundred miles a dozen large islands and uncounted small ones separate the inside passage to Alaska from the open Pacific. The land is mountainous and forest clad. It is broken by long inlets and narrow passages, as if the mountains and the sea had staged a stupendous conflict which had ended in a draw.

"Stanton wants an alibi," Greg insisted doggedly. "He's wasn't stalling when he asked me about hunting white bear. He didn't expect us to get out to tell it. He asked because he really wanted to know the best place to go. He'd be a fool to run for it, try to sneak out. He's safest here."

"He could have made this inlet Wednesday night, a couple of hours after dark," Ross agreed. "Ticklish hole for a stranger to be poking into. Nice bunch of reefs to pile up on. I kissed a brick here myself once in a fog. An Indian, Sam Goodale, had a bunch of fur I was after."

"Probably no place for us to go snooping around in the gas boat," Greg said with a significant glance at Ann.

"We'd do better with the dinghy. And we ought to start at four. Let's get some sleep."

The islands were veiled by mist at dawn

but Ross welcomed it as he went on deck to untie the dinghy. Greg started after him then whirled back.

"Be careful!" he burst forth. "Better stay below decks."

"But why, Greg?" Ann asked in amazement.

"I don't like this business of leaving you Stanton's not alone. He couldn't handle that boat. They might even bring the *Templar* out past here and there's no telling how long Ross and I will be gone. I—I wish you were a thousand miles from here!"

"I'm glad I'm not," she answered simply. "I'm glad there is danger. You seem to forget that I have something to worry about, too."

She looked up at him, smiling so bravely Greg suddenly felt very humble, so humble he could only reach for her fingers, grip them softly and bolt up the steps.

"Near as I can make out, this isn't any neighborly visit," Ross said when they had pulled away. "We're not going to be welcome and the nearer we can get without being seen the better."

GREG was at the oars. They had a rifle and a revolver. Ross's shotgun was left on the boat. Ann watched until they disappeared and then ducked below to wash the breakfast dishes. When she came on deck again the mist was gone and the sun was shining.

The scene was startlingly beautiful. A little surf worked in among the islands, edging the blue water with lace. The islands, thickly covered with cedar, completely protected the *Willing Slave*. A gap in one permitted a tiny view of the wide sea beyond. A seal thrust his head above the surface and stared curiously as he swam about.

After a while Ann went below to do some laundry. She had only a thin silk dress and sweater when she and Greg escaped from the camp and Ross Shelby had loaned her a

wool shirt and overalls. The laundry done, she took it on deck for drying. The last garment was fluttering in the breeze and Ann had sat down, trying to reconcile the peacefulness of the scene with the grim task that lay before Greg and Ross, when she heard the click of oar locks beyond the islet to the east.

Ann knew what she could expect if Stanton found her there and in terror she leaped to her feet and dashed below. From a port hole she saw a white yacht dinghy come out past the end of the islet.

A young man was rowing but he became motionless when he saw the *Willing Slave*. For a time he sat there staring at it. Ann, peeking from behind a curtain, saw that he was blond, young and rosy-cheeked, assuredly unlike a criminal. And then the dinghy swung in the current and she saw "*Templar*, Seattle," on the stern.

Pushing on the oars, he came slowly toward the gas boat. A rifle lay against the stern seat. He was dressed in the usual hunting garb furnished by sporting goods houses and it was startlingly new.

"Ahoy, there!" he called when twenty feet away. "Anyone aboard?"

Ann peeked again and was sure he had seen her. In terror, she set the shot gun in the companionway. He was moving closer and the thought that he might come aboard drove her to the deck.

"Good morning!" he called cheerfully when he saw her. "Didn't know we had any neighbors. When did you get in?"

Ann felt that her throat was too dry to speak but she managed to say, "Last night."

"Cozy little nook you're anchored in," the young man remarked as his dinghy stopped alongside.

He was still smiling but his blue eyes were noting everything—the boat, the girl, her overalls and khaki shirt, the apparent absence of anyone else on the craft. Ann felt that she must spar for time.

"Not many yachts get into these waters," she said.

"Is that so?" he asked with quick interest. "It's my first cruise on the B. C. coast. We've been here a week and haven't seen a soul."

Ann was silent. He saw the name on the stern of the gas boat and laughed.

"Your boat?"

Ann hesitated only an instant before she said, "My brother's."

"Live near here?"

She had been studying the chart in the search for the *Templar* and took the first name she remembered, "Swindle Island."

"Going to be here long?"

"I don't know," Ann answered. "My brother and his partner are looking for a new place to trap this winter."

"Oh, they're trappers!" the young man exclaimed with quick interest. "Wonder if they know anything about the little white bears on this island?"

"They've killed two or three. I've seen several myself."

"You have! That's wonderful. It's why I came, Mr. Stanton and I. We want to get specimens for a museum. I wonder—do you think your brother could help us?"

The question dazzled Ann with its possibilities, but she displayed no enthusiasm when she said, "Maybe."

"When will they be back?"

"They didn't say."

THE conversation languished. The young man was thoughtful and Ann saw that his eyes were not always dancing. They could be very cold.

"Have you seen any other boats near here?" he asked suddenly.

Ann shook her head.

"I mean anywhere near here," he persisted. "Any sort of boat, leaving or coming or passing."

He was very tense and his eyes held hers.

"No," she said, achieving a normal tone at great effort. "Few boats come this way."

"Have you been near here long? Would you have seen one?"

"We've been poking in and out of holes along Laredo Channel for three or four days," Ann told him.

"Know of anyone living near here?"

"No."

He looked away, sat very still. All the lightness was gone from his tone and features. A sullen anger seemed to possess him. He shipped his oars at last, seemed about to depart.

Ann thought of Greg and Ross out looking for Stanton. Without this man's aid, the pirate leader could be more easily captured. Even his return might spoil plans they had made. She stepped to the companionway, and the man looked up quickly.

"What will I tell my brother when he comes?" she asked.

"If he'll just wait here, I'll be back at noon."

"Where are you anchored?"

"I don't know as I can tell without a chart. I'll be back."

He dipped his oars. The shotgun was just inside. Ann reached for it, jerked it out, cocked and lifted the weapon.

"Don't take a stroke," she said. "Drop the oars and turn around in your seat."

The man stared at her without moving.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded harshly. "Put down that gun!"

With a swift motion, he reached for the rifle. Ann trembled, felt her head swim, but she pulled the trigger.

The No. 6 shot shattered the rifle stock between the young man's feet. A half dozen struck his right hand as he was about to raise the weapon. Water flowed into the dinghy from the hole torn in the bottom. He stared at it, looked up in sudden terror.

"I can't swim!" he shouted.

Ann needed that admission. Her trembling ceased and she thought to move her finger to the other trigger.

"Pick up the rifle by the barrel with

your left hand, then drop it overboard," she commanded. When he had done this she added: "Now row to the stern, fasten your boat and get out."

He obeyed her orders, at last stood facing her on the deck.

"Sit down with your feet hanging over and your back to me," she said. "And don't move, because I'll shoot again."

He complied readily. Ann continued to stand there, her back against the pilot house. The gun grew heavy as the minutes passed. She tried to steel herself by thinking of what this man and the others had done, what they were capable of doing. She wondered how long it would be before Greg and Ross returned. It suddenly occurred to her that they might never come back. The thought appalled her. She had hold of something and she could not let loose.

After half an hour the young man laughed.

"I'm standing this a lot better than you are," he said. "I'll outlast you. You'll go mad before long and throw that gun overboard."

Ann started. That impulse had come to her. She wondered how long she could stand the strain.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE they left the *Willing Slave*, Greg and Ross had decided on a plan. Ross was unknown to Stanton or any of his gang. Stanton would be playing the part of big game hunter and museum collector. He would welcome the appearance of a native, for it would help his alibi and might aid him in getting a specimen of the Princess Royal Island white bear.

Accordingly, if they located the *Templar*, Greg was to be put ashore with the rifle while Ross rowed up to the cruiser alone, the revolver thrust inside his trousers and beneath his blue jumper. Then, when the opportunity presented itself, he

was to cover Stanton and whoever was with him and take them prisoner. Greg, from on shore, was to render what aid he could with the rifle.

"Chances are, he'd go up to the head of the arm," Ross said when they had threaded their way among the islands and were approaching the point on the northern side of the entrance. "Keep to starboard. Lot of reefs in here. I hit the one that shows just ahead."

They rounded the point. Before them, on the north shore, were several points with bays between.

"We've got to go easy," Ross said. "I'm not looking for him down here but we can't take chances."

They had muffled the oarlocks with strips of cloth. Greg rowed cautiously. Ross sat in the stern with the rifle across his knees.

One point ended in a high cliff and at Greg's suggestion they beached the dinghy and climbed to the top for a look beyond.

"This is easy!" Ross whispered excitedly as soon as he reached the crest. "There's the *Templar* high and dry."

Greg scrambled up and looked through a fringe of small cedars. A quarter of a mile away, in the shelter of a cove, the *Templar* lay, shored up, on the beach. A man stood beside it.

"That's Stanton!" Greg exclaimed. "And he's alone."

"The dinghy's there."

"The *Templar* carried two. Someone's with him and has gone out for help. They must have hit something."

"You saw that entrance," Ross laughed, "and they tried it in the dark, about high tide. But the point is, we've got him right where we want him. You start around the shore with the rifle and I'll row in on him. Bet this being on the beach is one thing he didn't count on with all his clever scheming."

They separated. Greg made his way quickly back along the ridge and was in an advantageous position among the rocks

within a hundred yards of the *Templar* before Ross rowed into sight.

Stanton was working on the hull, evidently patching a split plank. He started when he saw Ross, watched him for a moment, then walked down to the edge of the water and stood there while the dinghy approached.

"Hello, stranger," Ross greeted him. "Looks as if you was in trouble."

"Looks like it," Stanton agreed shortly.

"They surveyed this coast at night and in the dark of the moon. Chart really gets you into trouble because you get to hoping it might be right."

"It wasn't the chart's fault," Stanton said. "I was at the head of the inlet and ran too close to shore."

"Kissed a brick, eh? I've done it myself more'n once in these waters. Split a plank?"

"Yes. Had to beach her."

"A plank's nothing. Need any help?"

"She's ready to float when the tide rises. When did you get in here?"

Stanton had tried to make the question casual but he watched Ross closely.

"About dark last night. I generally anchor out among the islands."

"Come from the north?"

"South. Been down in Laredo Inlet and Laredo Channel looking for trapping prospects. Sure I can't give you a hand?"

HE STEPPED ashore and walked past Stanton to the place where he had been working. Stanton followed, and as he stooped to pick up a hand saw, Ross jerked out the revolver.

"Now, stranger," he said, "just reach for that guard and hang onto it. I'm not taking any chances and I'll shoot quick."

Stanton did not speak but straightened slowly and studied Ross, and when Ross motioned significantly with the weapon, Stanton reached for the guard.

Greg had already started from his vantage point and came running across the

beach. Stanton turned his head, saw who it was, and stared.

"You've seen him before, I take it," Ross laughed. "This was easy, Greg, but we got to hustle. The other one might come back."

Greg did not waste time. In two minutes he had Stanton's hands bound securely behind him.

"Now, I'll have a look inside," he said.

"Hurry it," Ross urged. "I don't want the other one popping at me with a rifle."

Greg climbed aboard, emerged after several minutes to report that he could not find trace of the loot.

"We're after the man," Ross growled. "And now we've got him we'll take him to the police as quick as we can. If it's not aboard his boat he cached it, or the speed boat did have it. And let's use his dinghy. Mine's small for three."

Greg shoved the *Templar's* large tender into the water. Stanton was hustled aboard and made to sit down in the bow. Greg rowing, Ross standing guard with the rifle and keeping watch for the *Templar's* other dinghy, they started back toward the entrance.

Neither on shore nor on the water did they see anyone. They passed among the islands, turned south, rounded a point and found the *Willing Slave* before them.

"That girl!" Ross shouted, his admiration greater than his amazement. "And we worrying about having her along."

They came alongside, ordered Stanton aboard, relieved Ann of the heavy shotgun.

"How did you do it?" Greg demanded.

"He came along and I thought he shouldn't leave," she answered with a shaky laugh. "Oh, it's been hours!"

"Getting soft, Ritzie?" Stanton snarled. "Why I ever took you instead of Dalquest, I'll never know. You—" and in a burst of malevolence he began to curse Ann's prisoner.

"Stop that!" Greg cut in sharply. "You can't get out from under. It was your own mistakes that caught you."

"You haven't got me yet."

"We soon will have," Ross assured him. "And you know what they do to a murderer in British Columbia. It's not like the States."

"Murder!" Stanton scoffed. "What you talking about?"

"Ben Wallace!" Greg cried furiously. "That was your biggest mistake—why I came after you."

"Wallace just left."

"I found his body."

It hit Stanton. He was silent for a moment and then he began to laugh. There was mirth in it, of a diabolical sort. The others stared at him. Greg started forward angrily but Ross held him back.

"It's the gold," he whispered. "Let him laugh."

"Yes, the gold!" Stanton shouted. "If they hang me, I'll laugh. No one will ever see it again."

Ross and Greg bound both prisoners and lashed them together on the after deck of the *Willing Slave*.

"I'd sooner have a hold full of dynamite," Ross said when the task was done. "Let's get back to Wright Sound and turn 'em over quick as we can."

"Police boats ought to be thick around there," Greg agreed. "Tide's with us. Two hours will do it."

But they arrived on the inside passage to find the waters empty. Not a craft of any description was in sight.

"Ninety miles to Prince Rupert," Ross said. "Hate to keep 'em aboard that long but there's nothing else."

THEY turned west in Wright Sound but had not gone half a mile before Greg sighted a white hull rounding Kingcome Point behind them.

"American halibut schooner," he said after looking with the glasses. "Bound for the Gulf of Alaska but they could stop at Ketchikan or Prince Rupert."

"You two better go along," Ross suggested.

"Yes," Greg agreed, "only—I'd like to finish this thing."

"You mean——" Ann began breathlessly. "Oh, Greg! If we only could!"

They were in the tiny pilot house, keeping an eye on the prisoner lashed on the deck outside.

"He said nobody would ever see that gold!" Ross exclaimed scornfully. "Laughed about it. I'd like to see any city fellow hide anything where I couldn't find it."

Ann sent Greg a swift smile. Ross Shelby had entered upon the chase with only doubts but since the capture of the prisoners he had led the excited discussion in which they tried to piece together all the bits of evidence they had.

"All right," Greg said. "We'll stop the halibut schooner, ask them to drop the prisoners in Prince Rupert, and then go back and look for the gold."

"It's there, all right," Ross agreed. "Can't be anywhere else."

Stanton and his young accomplice were transferred to the fishing vessel only after an argument with her captain.

"Those pirates are dead, all of them," he protested. "The police say so."

"The police don't know half of this," Greg retorted. "We've been on the spot, knew what was coming off."

"Then why didn't you send out word?"

"How could we, and keep after these two? We didn't catch them until four hours ago."

In the end a detailed story was necessary, but when it had been told the captain agreed readily to take the prisoners.

"Police boats have stopped us three times since we left Seattle," he chuckled. "Hope they try it again. And don't forget us when the reward is paid. A coast guard boat told us this morning they are offering a hundred thousand dollars."

At six o'clock that night the *Willing*

Slave was anchored near the *Templar*. Ann had prepared supper and they had eaten. The motor was no sooner stopped than all three jumped into the dinghy and rowed ashore.

The tide was nearly out, the shores had slipped from the guard rail at high tide at noon and the cruiser lay on her port side.

"Stanton told me they hit a rock near the head of the inlet," Ross said, "and that they had to beach her when they got down here."

"But she's been under water," Greg protested. "When I was aboard her I saw where grease had risen to the deck beams on the starboard side."

They walked along the starboard side, where Stanton had been working.

"And look at this," Gregg continued. "The only place a plank is spilt is way aft of amidships. It's the garboard strake, too. How could she hit there?"

"He'd never tell the truth about it," Ann said.

"Then, when he beached her here, the first thing he did was to get the gold ashore and hide it," Greg insisted. "Here's where we start to look."

"Maybe," Ross conceded dubiously, "but his laughing that way—I'm wondering if he didn't cache it at the camp. He had it there a day and a half."

THEY climbed aboard and immediately Ross found evidence to confute his conjecture. On the after deck, near the companionway to the stateroom beneath the trunk cabin, the painted canvas was scarred and, in several places, had been cut. In the pilot house they found the linoleum marred in the same way.

"The gold's here," Ross conceded. "And they weren't any too careful about unloading it."

"Had to get it out in a hurry," Greg added.

They carefully examined the entire boat

and found that the gold had been carried in the bilge beneath the main cabin forward and the stateroom aft. They discovered, also, that the *Templar* had no other ballast, except in the engine room.

She had been under water, too. Grease from the bilge had risen to the top and left an unmistakable line.

"Just the starboard deck was under," Greg said. "I can't dope it out. Let's hunt on shore."

They found an outboard motor lying on the beach but though they searched until dark they found no evidence that Stanton or his companion had gone back from the water except to cut timbers to shore up the *Templar*.

"One of two things happened," Greg said when they returned to the *Willing Slave*. "They struck at the head of the arm, as Stanton said, and, afraid the *Templar* might sink, they carried the gold ashore, or else they took it from here in the dinghies and hid it somewhere else."

"The dinghies will show it," Ross said. "Two tons of anything is a lot for a couple o' men to handle. If they carried it away in the dinghies, those heavy weights would have marred them."

He took a flash and went outside, where he examined the larger of the *Templar's* two tenders.

"Not a sign," he said. "We'll look at the other in the morning."

The second dinghy, the bottom of which Ann had perforated with a load of shot, had been left on an island where the *Willing Slave* had anchored the previous night, but when they went there early in the morning it, too, failed to show evidences of having been used to transport heavy objects.

"That leaves us with the whole beach to hunt over," Ross muttered. "May take us a month."

"And this afternoon half the boats in Prince Rupert will be in here," Greg added. "It'll be like a stampede."

"Listen!" Ann cried. "Here's one now."

The exhaust of a gas boat, low and indistinct, suddenly burst in a loud clangor and then a small, garishly painted craft came into sight around an island.

"Oh, Greg!" Ann cried. "We can't let anyone else find it!"

CHAPTER IX

AS SOON as the newcomer saw the *Willing Slave* he turned toward it. "Sam Goodale!" Ross exclaimed. "I've bought a lot of fur of him."

Greg had already recognized the craft as an Indian's. The after cabin told that. "How'd it do to hire him to help hunt," he suggested.

"Maybe," Ross said. "He hangs around here a lot. Might be able to tell us something."

The newcomer had slowed down and the three got into the dinghy and rowed out to the *Willing Slave*. Sam Goodale brought his craft alongside.

"Hello, Ross!!" he cried genially. "Ain't you out early?"

"Not too early to catch you in bed, Sam. How's the missus?"

"Getting thin," Sam laughed, and he called down the hatch in his own language.

An enormous squaw squeezed out onto the deck, her broad, fat face breaking into wrinkles of good nature when she saw Ross. She jabbered in her own language. Greg understood none of it but he knew at once that Ross was on terms of unusual intimacy with these two.

"She says you go by here two-three days ago," Sam explained.

Ross started.

"How's that?" he asked.

"She have good luck. Every time you come around she say it bring her good luck. When you go by?"

"This is Sunday. It was Wednesday night."

Sam and his wife talked this over at length.

"She think that near enough," Sam said at last. "We come Thursday night. She have her good luck Friday morning."

"I'm glad to hear it," Ross said. "Tell her I'll go by any time she needs anything. But look here, Sam. Have you seen any boats around here since you came?"

Sam laughed and interpreted the question. His wife slapped her huge thighs and chuckled.

"Sure we did," Sam said. "Two days ago. American boat."

Both Greg and Ross started.

"Where?" Ross demanded. "What was its name?"

"Don't remember name but she American boat. She say Seattle on the stern."

"How many men aboard?"

"Five-six."

"Six!" Ross repeated, and he glanced questioningly at Greg. "Sure?"

"Those American halibut boats have five-six men," Sam stated. "This one she bust her water tank off shore and come in to get some more for drinking."

"Halibut schooner!" Greg exclaimed. "Was that Stanton's game, transshipping it?"

"Can't you remember its name?" Ross insisted, but Sam only shook his head.

"See another American boat?" Greg asked.

"No. Those halibut schooners stay off shore. Not often you see one."

"But this was a yacht, about fifty feet."

"What you want him for?" Sam asked with sudden suspicion.

"Somebody wants to kill a white bear," Ross explained. "Said they were coming down this way."

"Me no see 'em."

"Been inside this arm?"

"No, just stop out here."

and he knew he could trust Sam's statement that he had not seen any one. Greg, too, felt that they were losing time. He had not suspected the possibility of the pirate gang using a halibut schooner to get the loot to Seattle, but one had come inshore after Stanton's arrival.

The Indian woman began to talk excitedly.

"She say you wait," Sam interpreted. "She say she got to tell you her good luck or may be it won't come any more."

"I'll stop when I come back," Ross answered.

"No; we go pretty soon, down to China Hat. She say she never get any good luck again if she not tell you."

The squaw was jabbering furiously.

"All right," Ross said. "Make it snappy."

That was impossible. Sam had to explain where they came from, where they were going, and why, and how they happened to stop among the Surf Islands.

"The old lady she want some clams," he said. "There good place here and the tides they low now. So we anchor in these islands Thursday night and the next morning daylight she go to the beach in canoe. But she come right back, all talking like a bunch of sea gulls, and she take me to the reef over there in the channel and sure enough I see it, too."

"See what?" Ross demanded impatiently.

"Lead. What you call pigs. On that reef in the middle of the channel there. Forty-five of them."

"Forty-five pigs of lead!" Ross repeated. "How did they get there?"

"You just guess about that," Sam laughed. "Any kind of guess good."

"But how long had they been there? Who could have left them on a reef that uncovers only at low water?"

Sam only shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that he was not hiding anything. It was a mystery that he had not tried to fathom.

"That's the reef I showed you yester-

ROSS turned away. It was getting late and he was impatient to be moving,

day morning," Ross told Greg. "The one I hit in a fog once. Charts don't give it."

Greg nodded. He remembered the bunch of kelp-covered rocks showing about four feet at low tide.

"Let's be getting on," he said impatiently.

"Tell the missus I'm glad I brought her good luck," Ross said. "We got to be going."

"But you not hear it all yet!" Sam protested. "We take the gas boat over and load those pigs on the deck. That was a heavy job. You never think anything so little be so heavy. We forget all about the clams and right away we start on to China Hat. Fishermen use lot of lead. We think we can sell it easy."

"We get just a mile and see a halibut schooner going into Surf Inlet. She stop to ask us where she can get water and the captain he see the lead. He say, 'How much you want?' and I say, 'How much you give?' and he say, 'Fifty dollars.' I tell the old lady and she say, 'Ross Shelby he close near here someplace. We take it.'

"The captain he ask where we get it and I tell him. He say I'm lying but he don't care. He take it and get his water and go and we stay in Surf Inlet until this morning and then come back here to get some clams. The old lady she know you somewhere close," and Sam laughed delightedly.

Greg had started forward to lift the anchor but came back. He was leaning across the trunk cabin when Sam finished.

"Ross!" he exclaimed sharply. "We've got to know the name of that halibut schooner. We've got to!"

Ann and Ross stared at him. Not since his arrival at Ross's float house had he shown such excitement.

"It's what we're looking for!" he rushed on. "Make him remember, Ross."

Sam looked up suspiciously.

"I'll give you fifty dollars more if you tell the name of the halibut schooner,"

Ross said, and he drew a leather bill fold from a pocket.

Sam talked to his wife and they argued excitedly in their own tongue. At last the Indian turned.

"It not Edna," he said. "Not so long—girl's name."

"Ena?" Ann asked, and Sam nodded vigorously.

GREG motioned his companions below below after Ross had paid the fifty dollars.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he kept repeating.

"Slow up and get it to us," Ross commanded sharply.

"The *Templar* had no ballast in her except some cement in the engine room," Greg said. "She was plastered with grease inside, showing she had been under water. Where she lay on the beach she was almost level but the grease line showed the water had risen only a little way in the bow but had flooded the after deck. That's what I couldn't dope out. It wasn't on the beach where she is now that she filled."

"Get to the point," Ross interrupted.

"Here's what happened. The *Templar* got to those islands after eleven o'clock Wednesday night, just before high tide. Remember her bucking the flood in Whale Channel?

"Now Stanton didn't intend to go to Laredo Inlet. This is closer, and I told him it was nearly as good a place for bear. He could get to work sooner, establish a better alibi. So he tried to get into this arm after dark, with a chart that tells nothing, and he piled up on that reef.

"He hit her so hard he couldn't pull off and had to lie there while the tide went out. At low water she slipped and split her garboard strake on the starboard side. The bow was in the air, the stern down. She's got a lot of deadrise and lay far over. When the tide came in Thursday forenoon she wouldn't lift, just filled. They didn't

know how to raise her but they thought taking out the ballast would help. So that night, at low water, they took it out and piled it on the reef."

"Then, light, she lifted after midnight Thursday," Ross broke in.

"Sure! And they towed her to that beach in the cove with the dinghy and outboard motor. At low tide in the morning they were working on the boat, never thinking anyone would see the lead, covered with kelp, in the short time it was above water. But Friday night when they went to make sure it was all right they couldn't find it. The young fellow was looking for it yesterday while Stanton got the *Templar* ready to float at high tide at noon."

"That's why he asked me if I had seen any other boats!" Ann interrupted.

"Of course! They had thought it was safe enough. It was. I'd have chanced such a thing. Forty-five pigs of lead don't take up much space. But Sam's squaw happened by and she and Sam had them off in a hurry."

"And is that all you've got?" Ross demanded disgustedly. "It's not worth fifty dollars, I thought you knew something."

"I do!" Greg shouted. "Think, man! What if you wanted to get two tons of gold into Seattle without being caught at it? You've said that even being a big game hunter wouldn't get Stanton past a search. But Stanton knew he could get past. He covered those gold bars with molten lead, running them into a regular pig mold and using them for ballast in the *Templar*."

"You're crazy!" Ross retorted. "Where'd you get that idea?"

"Before we hunted you up, the first day after Ann and I escaped, I broke into Ben's cabin and I found some pellets of lead. The floor had been scorched in places as if by molten metal or coals. That's what they were doing Tuesday and Wednesday, why they didn't leave sooner."

"But Greg!" Ann cried. "If that is true, where is the gold now?"

"In Seattle, or on its way there. The captain of the halibut schooner knew he could turn it over in a hurry. Now we're got to get to Seattle."

He leaped to his feet, but Ross was not convinced.

"Sounds like a fairy tale to me," he grumbled.

"So's this whole affair, if you look at it that way," Greg laughed. "And that's why Stanton laughed. The gold was gone. Even he didn't know where it was."

Ross began to grin.

"If this is so!" he gasped. "Wait until I tell Sam and his old lady what they had aboard."

CHAPTER X

AGAIN the *Willing Slave* went north to Wright Sound in search of the police or a ship. Her crew had been elated before, when they took their prisoners. Now, with the whole world believing the gold was lost forever and they alone knowing how it could be found, the three were wildly exuberant.

"There a chance," Ross said, "that the *Ena* won't reach Seattle for several days. The halibut schooners that fish off this coast usually stay out a week and it takes them two or three days to run in."

"They got the lead from Sam Friday morning," Greg began to estimate. "If they were out of water and had a full hold of fish, they wouldn't have put in here but would have picked up water on the way down."

"And if they've gone back to fish," Ross took it up, "that means four days at the earliest before they reach Seattle, which makes it Monday night or Tuesday."

"Monday is tomorrow!" Ann cried in dismay. "And what would they do with it?"

"Sell it," Gregg answered. "Being in hundred-pound pigs, as lead usually is sold, they'll have no trouble."

"But who uses it?" the girl persisted.

"The salmon trollers buy a lot. Their weights run from five to forty pounds. It's used for weighing nets and fish traps. The better yachts use lead for ballast. Racing craft always do."

"And fishermen, they would melt the pigs!" Ann cried.

Ross laughed.

"I'd like to see a Cape Flattery troller melting up a pig of that lead," he chuckled. "Wouldn't he wonder who was crazy?"

"If we can stop a ship today, get off a wireless to Seattle, the police can meet the *Ena* when she comes in," Greg said.

"But we don't want to do that!" Ann protested. "Not unless we have to. Why that's our gold! I couldn't bear to have anyone else find it and melt the lead off. How long would it take us to go to Seattle in the *Willing Slave*?"

"Three and a half to four days, with good weather," Ross answered. "And that's running day and night. That lead might be scattered all over Puget Sound by then."

"There's a chance the *Ena* had only started to fish," Greg said. "Then it would be a week or more before she got in."

Chance decided the question. For hours they lay in Wright Sound without sighting a vessel of any kind. At last, in mid-afternoon, they saw the white hull of an American halibut schooner coming out of Grenville Channel.

She was a seventy-four footer, fresh from the Alaskan banks with sixty thousand pounds of fish, Seattle-bound after a three-weeks trip. Without wireless, and not having touched at any port, she had heard nothing of the piracy. Her captain, angry because he was stopped, would not believe them at first and it was necessary to recite the entire story before he permitted Ann and Greg aboard.

"We'll be back soon!" they called to Ross as the schooner got under way.

The remainder of the day Ann and Greg were kept busy telling their story to the

fishermen. The crew, without news of any sort for so long, insisted on every detail.

Only in the matter of the forty-five pigs of lead were the two reticent.

"It's our discovery!" Ann whispered to Greg that night. "We've done everything so far. It would be a shame if we didn't finish this."

"I'm willing," he laughed. "Though there's another kick in it than that for me. Thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents is going to save the camp and a little piece of Fourth Avenue real estate that I was just getting ready to lose."

"A third!" Ann exclaimed. "I won't listen to it. You and Ross—"

"Not for one minute!" he declared emphatically. "Covering that fellow with a shotgun was worth it alone. Why, Ann, we'd never have done anything without you. Ross wouldn't listen to it, nor would I."

It was dark on the schooner's deck. Some lights appeared on the starboard bow.

"That's China Hat," Greg said. "Wonder if Sam and his wife and their hundred dollars are there yet."

"Do you know what I'd like to do if we find that gold?" Ann demanded. "I'd like to be with Ross when he tells them."

"You will be!" he cried huskily. "Don't you know what we're going to do when this is all settled an' we are free to get away? Haven't you thought?"

"I had only a month's vacation from my job in Duluth," she answered.

"Duluth will never see you again!" and he drew her into the shadow of the pilot house. "We're going back to the camp, Ann. Just you and I. And we'll fish and hunt goats this fall, and—"

"Pig!" she whispered under his chin. "You're after my thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents, too."

THE *Estrella* was ready to sail for British Columbia on her maiden cruise.

Martin Saunders, her new and proud owner, had stocked her with provisions and ushered his guests aboard. They were waiting for only one last adjustment to be made on the motor.

Saunders was in the pilot house, pointing to gadgets and the grain of teak and the color of mahogany when two strangers stepped aboard.

"Are you the owner?" the young man asked.

"I am," and Saunders stiffened at a premonition.

"And you took some lead on board for ballast yesterday?"

"I did."

"Would you mind if I examine a pig of it?"

"I most certainly would!" Saunders exploded. "It's my lead. I've paid for it. This is a new boat, all ready to sail for her first cruise. I've known nothing but delays for a month and I'm damned if I stand for another one. Get off my boat."

"Ann," and the young man turned to the girl beside him, "will you please run to the phone and call the police while I wait here!"

She was off instantly. Saunders watched her and then turned to Greg.

"Was that your lead?" he demanded. "If it was, I'll make it right. I didn't know it was stolen. We had to have it; a man offered us two and a half tons. Name your price. I can't stand any more. My guests are aboard and we are ready to leave."

"It's not my lead and, so far as I know, the lead wasn't stolen," Greg answered quietly. "Nevertheless, I'd like to examine a pig of it. And if you don't let me, I'm sure the police will back me up."

"If it isn't yours you can't!" Saunders roared. "Get off my boat. I'm tired of this."

Greg stepped onto the dock and waited. A peek in the engine room as he passed

the hatch assured him the *Estrella* would not sail for half an hour at least.

And in eight minutes a patrol wagon filled with plain-clothes men arrived. Greg whispered to their leader and they swarmed over the yacht and over the protesting Saunders. A hatch in a stateroom floor was raised and a pig of lead lifted from the bilge.

Under Greg's direction, this was carried to the boat builder's machine shop and placed on an anvil. Greg, Ann, Saunders, his guests and the detectives gathered around while a machinist was summoned. He brought a big cold chisel and a sledge and with a helper, began cutting the pig in halves.

It was slow work. The heavy sledge was brought down with crushing force but the chisel did not enter far.

"What's all this nonsense about?" Saunders demanded angrily.

No one answered. Greg and Ann, gripping each other's fingers, never looked away from the anvil.

"What you expect to find in that?" a detective whispered to Greg.

"Wait."

With a clatter, the heavy pig of lead fell to the floor in two pieces. The machinist picked one up and looked at the severed end.

There was no mistaking that yellow metal. No one there had ever seen gold in such quantities before, but each knew it.

Saunders' amazement was the greatest. "And I paid six cents a pound for that!" he whispered. "How much have I got aboard?"

"Two tons," Greg told him.

"The *Pacific's* gold!" a detective whispered. "A million and a quarter. Go phone for a truck, Jerry! And the reserves."

"Two tons of gold!" Saunders gasped. "In my boat! And I was going cruising with that!"

ONE MAN DOG



by MAT RAND

Pat Bompard, prospector of the north, had two prized possessions, his mine and his dog, Buck; and both were strangely menaced

PAT BOMPARD! A giant, good natured Frenchman of the North Country. I met him first through Al Turpin.

Turpin afterward made a fortune in British Columbia lumber; but as a gold stamper, he had become a North-beaten, whimpering wretch, wracked with scurvy, eager to crook a toe in a trigger and end it all. Pat Bompard had come across him and sent him out of the country, paying all the bills. That was Pat Bompard, I learned.

I met Al Turpin on that outgoing trip;

then I sought Pat Bompard. What a man! To see him was to be attracted to him. But to listen to him talk—ah, that was an event! We became great friends. And often I'd purposely get him started as we sat around a big stove in some dive of the creek country.

"Ma frien's," he would say, "she's big countree. But she ain' always been cold. A geologic doctor told me about her. She was hot lak California and all rivers run crazee, dat tam. De air was stiffler hot; volcanoes was belch many ashes, over hondred mile or so. And de gold jus' pack them

high rivers chock-full. You see de point? Pat Bompard all the tam look for old river bed, high up. Old abandon' river bed, *hein?*"

H E had made two small strikes; then he hit it.

I was a thousand miles away when I heard of Pat's great strike, and I came mushing down as if I were carrying the mail. I saw the town built, almost in a week; and—it struck me as odd—I saw a bank. Fancy a bank at the start of a new gold camp!

Pat showed me his mine, the Glory Hole. And I saw he had kept by him his old lead dog, Buck, who had been with him for four or five years. How Pat enthused over his mine as he showed it to me!

But when he talked of that bank!

"Ev'ry bank," he said, "is a one-man game. Hank Tivetts is de bank in dese place. And dat Hank is after my mine. Little nort' countree voices tal Pat Bompard dat Hank Tivetts ain' going for to get his Glory Hole."

"What do you mean, little voices?"

"What do you mean, little voices?" I asked.

Then he explained. He believed that all emotion expressed itself in some mysterious manner. Dogs know by scent when hunger, fear, love and hate are filling the minds of animals and men. Pat devoutly believed that a scent, exudation or emanation created an aura about a man when any of these emotive states had possession of his mind; and that by the supersensitive nostrils and natures of all dogs—and of some men—these mental changes were readily understood. He called his hunches "little voices," and he obeyed them like some religion.

Pat Bompard had sunk a shaft down to his main deposit and was getting ready to "drift" so that he could take out his mineral and drop it down by gravity to the mill as soon as he had constructed one.

He had just finished driving two laterals when word came that the north tunnel had bumped into water and was flooding him out.

I went to see Pat.

"Dat nort' drift strike de seepage of Glacier River. I need plenty money to buy pump outfit. Hank Tivetts got dat money; but, by gar, he want wolf share of my Glory Hole! I find way around dat, purty queeck. To-morrow I go wid my dog Buck into hills. Mebbe I can trade dat old sour-dough Ike Smith for hees claim what run between Glory Hole and dat davil Glacier River. I make Ike plentee wealthy when my mine she hit her gait."

Into the hills he went the next day, to learn that Hank Tivetts, the banker, had preceded him, and had already purchased the Ike Smith ground. Pat was dejected. Ike Smith had told him that the north tunnel Pat had driven could, by a quick shove, be made to open into an old cave on Smith's land and thus divert that seepage water down hill and back into the river.

"Where is dat cave?" Pat had asked Ike.

"Not thirty feet from where you stopped work. I heard your shots, and once caught the tap, tap of your double-jacking crew. I wonder if Hank had something dirty in his brain when he bought me out?"

Pat told me about this interview, and as he spoke his brows wrinkled and a glitter came into his great eyes; but when he told me good night, he said, "You remember how I tal you about dem little voices? Well, somet'ing very ugly—moch lak davil's work—is coming lak de wind to Pat Bompard. Somet'ing bad is come queeck! Bimeby you see!"

The next day a big spruce fell on him, pinning him down. He lay there for nine hours before he was found and brought back to camp. I went to see him, but he had not regained consciousness; so I contented myself with a talk with the camp physician.

"He'll get well," said the doctor, "but he'll be a cripple for life, unable to walk. At least, that's my present opinion."

"Why, man, who will take care of him?"

"I've written Al Turpin, for I knew Al, with all his money, might be able to help Pat. I hope to get Pat so that he can use his arms, and maybe get around in a wheel chair. You see that spruce cracked something in his spine. Not a bone, but it pinched off a wire to his nervous center and his motor system has gone dead. Don't go to see him. The shock will appall you."

WEEKS passed. When Pat was able to sit up I went to see him. He was smiling.

"What I tol' you?" he grinned, as I entered. "Dem little voices don' lie, no? Now, listen, ma frien'. Pat Bompard is goin' get well. Just lak dat!" He snapped a finger.

"The doctor thinks so, too," I lied.

"He don' know; but Pat Bompard does. Dem little voices tal him dat one minute, some tam, I goin' be cripple, and de next second I goin' be able to yump and run round lak a husky pup. By gar, here's fine t'ing! You know ma dog Buck?"

I nodded. He went on.

"Dat husky and me we have plenty bad luck, lots of tam. But Buck he know Pat Bompard is hees frien'. Dogs know dem t'ings, right off, *bam!* lak dat. Yestiddy I call Buck. I tal heem fetch me ma beeg black satchel. Well, what you t'ink? He pick heem op and bring heem to me. Den I tal dat dog, 'tak dat satchel down to store.' I write note, stick in satchel, and Buck, he run off.

"Back he come, bringing ma mail and t'ings I want. I say, 'Buck, you ol' rascal, you t'ink you're fine faller, *hein?*' I wish you could see hees eyes! Dat's all a dog want from a man. One pat on hees back wid de man's mouth! Ha, ha! I got plenty frien' in dat dog. He goin' be my errand boy. And what you t'ink? Dat faller I

help get out of dat dousy Black River countree, dat Al Turpin, he write me long letter, and, by gar, he sorry Pat Bompard is in soch a fix. He got plenty money, now, and he say when I wants somet'ing for me to send him one big holler, queeck. Mebbe I don' haf to make dat holler. I don' lak for be cripple. I don' lak to cause nobody trouble. Buck and me we get along purty well. How you lak dese wheel chair? I get round all right. Get my hands on somet'ing, *pauf!* I pull maself op, lak she bear at bee tree."

All winter the allegiance of Buck to his master was a loveliness over that entire camp. Swinging along, with that enormous satchel in his mouth, Buck could be seen daily, attending to the shopping needs of Pat Bompard. Frequently Pat would just sit in his chair at his door shooting at rabbits, and when he killed one Buck would retrieve it. Everybody knew this.

Spring came at last, and the camp settled down to big business mining.

This region of low-grade ore became nothing but a manufacturing proposition. So many tons, run through a mill, brought forth so much pay. Every one wondered why something wasn't done with Pat's Glory Hole. It was said that Hank Tivetts was fuming because he could not obtain Bompard's interest in the mine.

Then Hank called on Pat; but Pat sent him away.

Buck followed the banker down the hill, his roach sticking up on his back like a scrubbing brush. Tivetts told somebody that he was actually alarmed at the menacing attitude that dog had assumed toward him. Buck had trailed him all the way to his home.

The next day water was pouring into Pat's mine through his north drift, and that night it overflowed the main shaft and tumbled in long cascades down the side of the hill. When the moon came up I went to see Bompard.

"By golly!" he said, staring at the spot

where the moon was playing on the falling cascades. "Dat's water, eh? Ain't dat Glory Hole full of water?"

I told him as gently as I could what had happened.

I heard his teeth gritting, saw his huge fingers grip the sides of his wheel chair until his knuckles showed like white knobs. Buck had his eyes fixed on his master's face.

"Hank Tivetts done dat!" Pat snapped. Then for a long time he sat silently staring, listening to the soft purr of that water's fall across the gulch. Heaving a vast sigh, he began to talk.

"I reckon Pat Bompard's tam is come for to make dat holler to Al Turpin. You see, little voices don' lie, dese tam. Now I write for money to drive beeg tunnel from de bottom of dese gulch to my main shaft, and Hank Tivetts can tak de round trip to de *château* of M'sieu de Davil."

"Why, that tunnel would drain your Glory Hole, at that!" I said.

"You lak for do dese work for Pat Bompard?"

"You bet! And I'll fly at it to-morrow. I've got a little money, and the boys will work cheap for you when they know that you're fighting this way."

I WENT to work the next day, and kept at it until Al Turpin's money came. Then, with plenty of capital, I hit a fast clip. I wasn't into the soft stuff more than seventy-five feet before we'd bumped into a mass of low-grade which proved to me that, at depths, the Glory Hole was going to be a world-beater.

I conveyed the news to Pat, and his eyes sparkled like a boy's. The way his mind filled with delight set Buck to licking his hand and playing around him, in loud barks, like a nine-months pup. Then I saw the miracle.

One of Pat's paralyzed legs lifted slowly across the other.

"Pat! You moved a foot!" I cried.

"By gar! Dat's right!" he said, staring at his shoes. "How come dat? Pat Bompard didn't know he go for move de foot. Mebbe she's goin' come round all right, *hein?*"

Buck licked the heavy shoe that had slipped across its mate.

"See dat ol' frozen fish eater!" chirped Pat. "He see what you see, my frien'! Dat Buck, dat ol' scoundrel, he's purty smart dog, dat faller."

I left Pat in a jovial mood. On the way to town I ran across the doctor, and told him of the way Pat had moved one of his legs.

"In some of these suspended movement cases," explained the physician, "cures are effected in what appears to be a miraculous manner. As a matter of fact, nature takes her time, and when adjustment is made, something clicks and there you are, re-establishment of the correct functioning. But as a betting proposition the odds are against Pat." Then, as if thinking aloud, he added: "A mighty shock—a mental cataclysm, as it were—sometimes restores normal action in these cases. Al Turpin has written me that he wants Pat taken to New York to see the best expert North America has. Now that involuntary leg action might mean something to the right surgeon. But here's something: I'm afraid Pat is getting into trouble."

I was all ears. "What do you mean?"

"You know how Pat has been shooting rabbits from his window, across and down his gulch?"

"Yes."

"Well, Hank Tivetts says that Pat has been shooting at him. Pat's gun is a 38-55, and Hank has dug a bullet of that caliber out of a porch post of his home. It's a good four hundred yards from Pat's window to that post. Hank says a bullet smacked that post right ahead of him, two days ago, as he came on his steps. Do you think Pat could hit a walking man, that far away?"

"He's a crack shot. But he wouldn't try to murder a man!"

"Pat's gun is the only one in camp of that 38-55 caliber. The sheriff has been examining every known gun, and the stores in town all say that Pat is the only man who ever bought that ammunition. Tivetts declares he will swear out a warrant. I'm on my way to break the news to Pat."

"I'm going with you," I said, strange fear gripping me.

When we told the cripple of Tivetts' latest move, Pat said: "Boys, eight rabbits is all Pat Bompard is shoot from dese window. Reach up for dat ca'tridge box."

I handed him the shell container.

"In dese box," he said, before opening it, "dere should be forty-two shell. Now we count dem."

His pudgy fingers flew across the rows of shells; then he lifted a face from which the blood had suddenly drained. A horrible suggestion filled my mind as he said hollowly: "Only forty-one shell. Dat's fonny!"

"What is it, Pat?" asked the doctor.

"Forty-one shell is all dat's left in de box. Now dat's queer." His voice lifted to a screech. "Do you boys t'ink dat Pat Bompard, de cock-grouse of all de Yukon countree, would go for shoot at a man lak he keel de bull moose in de swamp?"

"No, I don't," I replied. "And right now I'm going down to have a look at the bullet hole in Tivetts' porch post."

The doctor went with me; but our search proved nothing. A chisel had gouged out the bullet, leaving no trace of the passage it had made in the heavy northern spruce post. But the next day a warrant was served, though no arrest was made. Pat was allowed to remain as he was until he could be taken to trial by a long voyage down the river.

He became taciturn; wouldn't eat, except the most tempting of dainties. Buck was to be seen, these days, making many

trips to and from camp with the black satchel swinging from his huge jaws.

ABOUT this time I ran into blue flint granite in the tunnel; and I had to tell Pat of the slow progress we were making.

"Dat's all right," he answered. "We go slow, now, mebbe; but everyt'ing goin' come out fine. De little voices tal me dat somt'ing happen purty queeck."

Then a curious light became visible in his eyes. "Hank Tivetts, after what he done to me, was op to see me last night. He wants to stop dat trial, and says he will give us plenty money to do all de work if I give him half interest."

"What did you say?"

"I'm in bed when he come. When he say dat to me, I point to the door and tal him to get out. He is carrying shotgun to keep off my dog. He leave my room, go into kitchen, close de door. Good t'ing he do dat, for Buck is watch' him all de tam. Buck would kill dat faller, and Tivetts know it. After Tivetts go away de little voice whisper in my head, 'Pat Bompard, you goin' haf plenty good luck, bimeby.'"

I THOUGHT he was a bit touched, at the time, and changed the subject. When I went home I doubted that Hank Tivetts had been fool enough to have visited Pat after having had him arrested. And somehow I had an ugly prompting that Bompard, in his mental derangement, might actually have tried to murder the banker. In the morning I walked by Pat's cabin on my way to work. I found him greatly excited.

"Somet'ing is gone wrong wid dat Buck of mine," he said. "I don' know what she is, dat t'ing, but Buck is lak crazy wolf dese morning. He make fonny noise in de t'roat, run around, sniff de floor, look from de window; and I t'ink he smells every place where Hank Tivetts is walk in de kitchen. When I open de outside door

Buck run off, hees nose to de dirt, and I see heem head for Tivetts' house. He is not come back. Mebbe he's goin' for to pull Hank Tivetts down. Mebbe de little voices of de nort' countree is tal heem somet'ing. I don' lak for heem to go after Tivetts. Dat ain't so good. Somebody might t'ink I sic him onto dat faller."

Leaving Pat, I studied about what he had said all day; and returning to see him that night, I stayed until nearly ten. On my way home I made up my mind to try to find the dog, for I thought it a cruelty to have Pat worrying about Buck; and frankly, I was fearful for Tivetts's safety. I seemed to feel evil in the air.

As I was passing down a back street I saw the deputy sheriff, stationed in that town, walking toward me with Tivetts. They hadn't caught sight of me. Then behind them I saw a blur of movement. A dog! I knew the shape immediately. Buck it was, and he was stalking along like a wolf, taking advantage of every shadow as he trailed the two men. I jumped a fence, concealing myself back of a bush. The men approached, stopped opposite me.

"What time is it?" muttered the deputy.

"Ten thirty, when I met you," replied Tivetts. "You go on and I'll go home. Eleven forty is the time I've set. Let's adjust our watches." A match flared, and by its light I saw the men's faces bending over their time-pieces. Under the trees Buck appeared like some ghastly statue of a dog.

"You sure you know how to set that switch?" asked the deputy.

"Yes. And I'll set the clock according to my watch," answered Tivetts.

A chill paralysis gripped me. My mind numbed. Clock? Switch?

Tivetts's voice jerked my racing mind back from that shocking suggestion.

"Ten o'clock was when I walked onto my porch. Get that," he whispered the words in a rasping murmur.

"Uh-huh," answered the deputy.

"All right, now I'll leave you," blurted the banker.

MY spine was crawling with the swarming diabolisms that festered in my mind. I seemed to be cursed with the awful realization of what Tivetts was about to do. I even sensed why Buck, that wonderful dog, was absent from Pat Bompard's home.

I didn't see the deputy part from the banker; for Buck had caught my scent and was coming toward my covert. I watched him approach, gingerly stepping to the fence, and lowering his muzzle to get a better smell of me. Then his tail wagged, I'll take my oath to that; for I saw him by a faint background of light which sprayed the scene from a reflection of the main street. He moved away, hurriedly, and I arose and ran pell-mell for the saloons which I knew to be open.

As I darted up to the White Front Bar the deputy had his hand on its door. We went in together.

"Just the man I want," he said.

He must have suspected something from the look he saw flick over my face; for he seemed to wilt when I asked him wickedly what he wanted of me.

"Pat Bompard has just sent another of those 38-55's at Hank Tivetts," he replied. "I've got to put a guard around Pat's place."

Drink-dulled denizens of that saloon swung around and stared at him. A scraping of feet and a mighty gasp coming from those men told of the effect the deputy's announcement had made in that room.

"What time was that shot fired?" I asked wickedly.

"Ten o'clock, Hank said," replied the deputy.

"It could not have been," I answered. "I was with Pat at that hour. You're following a wrong lead. Somebody else is trying to kill Tivetts."

The deputy sneered; but his cold eyes

worked in such a way that I knew I had disturbed his mind. I continued to talk, for I did not like the fury I saw flaming in the eyes of the men about that bar.

"If a bullet, a 38-55 bullet, is found in the front of Tivetts's home, he put it there himself; and he stole that shell from Pat's cabin. Tivetts went up to see Pat last night, and after he had tried to get Pat to agree to deeding him half of the Glory Hole, he walked out of the bedroom and closed the kitchen door after him. It was then that he stole one of Pat's shells, just as he stole that first cartridge."

"And are there men in this room who will believe that of a banker like Hank Tivetts?" asked the deputy. "No, come again, old man. Try something better than that. You see, nobody wants to hurt Pat. He's a nut. That spruce made him crazy; but we've got to confine him, and this time it means I got to handle him so that he won't hurt nobody in the future."

"Wait!" I yelled. "Doc and I counted the 38-55's in Pat's house. There were forty-one at that time. If you are on the square why not go back to Pat's and see how many shells are there now, and what condition Pat's gun is in? Are you willing?"

"Right!" said the deputy. "Let's go!"

Seven of us hurried to Bompard's and each of us watched the deputy as he counted the ammunition. There were but forty shells! The gun, however, was clean and odorless.

"Dat davil Tivetts!" yelled Pat Bompard. "Now I see it! Tivetts stole dat ca'tridge after he close de door on me and ma Buck, last night! I haven't shoot ma gun for weeks!"

The deputy sneered, picked up the gun and shells, and said in a tone intended to placate Pat.

"That's all right, old sourdough. You missed him. And now I'll take these so that you won't get into any more trouble. Come on, men, let's get down to Tivetts's

and I'll have him show you where the bullet hit . . . Are you coming?" he concluded.

"I'll join you later," I said. "I want to talk with Pat."

THE deputy and his companions moved from the cabin. When they were beyond earshot I said to Bompard: "I saw Buck down town a moment or so ago."

"Where was he?"

"Following this deputy and Tivetts." Then I told him of crouching down back of the bush, of seeing and hearing the two men, of Buck's discovery of me.

And all the while Pat's eyes were riveted upon a corner of the room. When I finished he stared at me coldly.

"Now I know what send Buck off crazy lak," he said, all the life gone from his mellow voice. "Dat beeg, black satchel of mine is gone! Gone, do you hear me? Gone!"

"Buck didn't have it when I saw him," I replied; then I jumped for the door and went careening down the hill after the hurrying huddle of men. I stubbed my toe and fell, knocking the wind out of me, so that for seconds I couldn't move a foot. But my mind was active and vibrating with a full consciousness of what Pat Bompard meant when he spoke of "little voices." I was filled with suggestions of a vast and impending ugliness, a hideous portent of disaster.

Of a sudden my heart ceased to pound, and my lungs filled. I arose and ran down the hill. Even as I reached the bottom I realized that I was too late. Already the deputy and his companions were before Tivetts's house; and as I hurried up, and was about to shout my fears, I heard a beastly, abysmal cry of human fear.

"You fellows run! Run!" It was Tivetts's voice, and it came from around the corner of his house. "Scatter, all of you! If you don't—"

Then he appeared, and to my dying day

I shall not forget the agony and terror I saw wracking his face and popping out of his wicked eyes.

I felt in that cry something which seemed to drive home to me the consciousness that my fears had been authentic.

"This way, fellows!" I cried, darting around the opposite side of the house. "Follow me!"

They obeyed, and when I was some distance up the hill from the house, say about a hundred feet, I stopped and stared back.

There, bursting into the light-swath cast by Tivetts's sitting room lamp, I saw the deputy running furiously (why he had waited I couldn't guess), and fifteen feet behind him raced Hank Tivetts. Both were heading straight away from the house—as it chanced, straight toward Pat's. Then another form came into the vision. Buck! And in his mouth was that black satchel of Pat Bompard, swinging sidewise. I knew the infernal thing was heavily loaded, for I saw how difficult it was for Buck to keep it from striking the earth as he ran along the path which led to his master's cabin. But surely he was keeping it clear of the ground.

Then it happened.

There was a roar, a flash, a shock which sent me and my companions to the earth. The detonation rocked the high hills and came back in ringing echoes. I remember seeing Tivetts' body hurtling head over heels down a dry creek's bank. Of Buck I saw nothing; but I knew surely what had happened.

THE men about me picked themselves up and we hurried to render what aid we could. Only the deputy was visible when we approached the vicinity of that explosion. By some quirk of the dynamite—giant powder is always tricky—he was still alive. We carried him to the doctor, and there he revived.

He caught my eyes and gave a tortured little smile.

"I saw that you were wise," he said. "What put you hep?"

"I was back of a fence when you and Tivetts compared your watches," I said. "And when you spoke of the clock and the switch, I was sure you planned to set off a time blast. I knew Buck had been out of Pat's cabin all day, and when I learned that the black satchel was gone, I guessed that Tivetts had stolen it, and intended to use it to throw blame on Pat for some outrage."

"If you had spoken," said the deputy, "I might not have tried to go through with it. Tivetts wanted to make it appear that Pat had sent his dog with a satchelful of giant powder to Tivetts's home for the purpose of blowing it up. We knew the iron-bound satchel would leave some parts laying around, and we figured that this would fix the blame on Pat sure. And we had things timed to explode the satchel just outside of Tivetts's home while the men I brought with me were with Tivetts on the front porch."

"But what did you intend to gain?"

"We figured there'd be a lynching; or at least that the Dominion would have to place Pat in an institution, and would sell his Glory Hole. Tivetts wanted that mine bad."

Then I understood that strange sense of malevolence which had come to me as I lay stunned at the foot of the long hill. Tivetts was dead, literally mangled beyond recognition.

And Buck was but a memory.

After giving the deputy his attention, the physician and I hurried to Bompard's.

His great, round face was pinched and drawn. The network of muscle spasms was making of it a writhing mass of jumping ligaments and nerves. Then he yelled:

"Where is ma Buck dog?"

"Dead," I answered gently.

"I knew it!" he cried, and he stood up on his feet, took a step toward me and

clutched my arm. "Tivetts, too, *hein?*"
I nodded.

"De little voices done tol' me dat," he said, as he sank to the floor, great racking sobs shaking his huge frame.

From that hour Pat could walk.

And within a month we had drained the Glory Hole and were working its mammoth deposits.

In the center of that town to this day, on a prominent corner of the city's park, there is a large white marble shaft. On one side is a bronze plate bearing this inscription:

BUCK

A Full Blood Husky

He loved one man

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LOOK FOR THE BLUE RIBBON ON THE COVER

THE PRICE OF A LEG



by BRIAN LOOMIS

Soogan Charley made good his boast, even though he lost a leg doing it

“THE North will never get me.”

Many times had I heard Soogan Charley make that declaration;

and it was not a brag, but the simple statement of a firm belief born of his many years' experience in the Arctic and a consciousness of his own almost superhuman strength and endurance. He defied the life-crushing cold of the Northern Winters as a man might defy an enemy whom he respects but does not fear. He knew that the Frost King like a sly assassin forever lurked on his trail, patiently awaiting the moment when his vigilance might relax, then to strike him down or leave him a

maimed and helpless cripple for the remainder of his life.

He never took a chance with the cold and had little patience with those who did—the unfortunate chechakos who through their ignorance of northern woodcraft lost fingers and toes and sometimes legs during their first Winter on the trapline.

“Boneheads,” he called them; “trying to beat Jack Frost at his own game when they don't savvy the first rules.”

All of us at the fur-trading town of Mooseville in those days concurred in

Charley's opinion—the North, indeed, would never get him.

As my boat swept around the bend of the river that July night, and I saw the town again for the first time in five tumultuous years, my mind was busy with speculations as to what changes I might find there. Alaskan fur towns I knew altered slowly in appearance; in population alone is a change perceptible from year to year, and I was prepared to find many absentees from my former list of acquaintances.

But I was thoroughly surprised to note at first glance a huge log building on the upstream edge of town. It was new, the fresh-peeled logs glistening white in the slanting rays of the midnight sun against the black background of spruce forest, in sharp contrast to the drab and brown of the other buildings, some of which had stood there for forty years or more.

As I swept nearer a large sign on the front of the building, "Mooseville Trading-Post," became visible, and I wondered which one of my old friends of the trap-line might have so prospered as to establish a trading-business in such an imposing structure.

A line of faces—the brown of Indians with here and there a white—topped the high cut-bank in front of town, and peered eagerly down to learn who the newcomer might be as my boat drew in and grounded on the narrow, sandy beach. The first man I recognized was Soogan Charley. He stood there bareheaded, his round, bald dome, brown as a mink, protruding above the crowd around him, glistening in the sun like a weather-beaten boulder on a moss-covered hilltop.

Five years apparently had wrought no change in his features; it was the same wind-toughened face that I remembered, the skin seared with innumerable tiny lines but unmarred by scars of frost-bite; and his eyes, which had never known snow-blindness, were still as alert and bright as those of an ermine. As he stood in that

nondescript crowd, like a lone spruce in a clump of tamarack, he might have passed for a man of thirty-five; but I knew that Soogan Charley had already seen his fiftieth birthday.

He bawled out a boisterous welcome when he recognized me, shoved his way through the crowd and scrambled down the bank—hobbled, I should say, for his right leg from the knee down was replaced by a wooden peg.

For a moment I did not believe my eyes. Soogan Charley with a wooden leg! It seemed almost inconceivable. Yet the leg was gone, and my surprize was so evident that Charley burst forth with a hearty laugh.

"Economy!" he bawled, striking the birch peg with his cane. "Cuts down expense in these hard times—a pair of moc-casins lasts twice as long now! Haw, haw!"

Of how the misfortune came upon him he told me nothing as we walked up the street toward the road-house, and I did not inquire; neither did I speak a word of the sympathy which I felt, but knew would not be welcome. I wondered how Charley, a trapper only, now managed to earn a living when shorn of his sole working capital, his bodily strength. From old Sam Adams, a one-time doctor, now postmaster and champion story-teller of Mooseville, I learned the details of Soogan Charley's misfortune.

"Yep, the North finally got him," Sam declared as we sat alone in his cabin and discussed old times.

Then he told me the story:

IT HAPPENED two years back. The freeze-up was early that Fall, but the first snow was very late—not a flake until past the beginning of December, when it seemed to come all at once, in one big, blinding storm, and with it the worst cold-snap the country ever saw.

Charley was at his trapping-grounds

about sixty miles up the Zimba, but when no snow came after the freeze-up, and he could not string his traps, he took a jaunt down to Mooseville and laid around for several days waiting for the weather to change.

One morning he arose and found a cold, stiff breeze blowing down from the North.

"She's coming," he declared, and rolled his pack and lit out for home.

He was traveling light—a robe, frypan, ax, rifle, grub for three days and an extra pair of moccasins and socks. Extra foot harness was almost a religion with Charley. He might have started out on a mush without grub, but extra moccasins and socks were always a part of his pack.

"Keep your feet dry and you'll never need crutches."

That was Charley's motto, and he lived it on the trail.

Charley covered about half the distance to his Zimba camp the first day and "Si-washed" for the night between two fires. It had turned bitter cold and was snowing a little when he got up the next morning—hard, dry pellets slanting down in the teeth of the cold north wind.

He was protected from the force of the storm by the timber on either hand, for he followed the Mooseville-Husky Creek trail cut the year before by the Yensen Mining Company when old Ole Yensen bought the Husky Creek placer mines. But when he reached the Zimba, about midday, it was necessary to turn to the right and follow up the open course of the frozen river on the last twenty-mile lap of his journey.

The storm was steadily increasing in its fury—the wind stronger, the snow thicker. Charley drew the hood of his parka close about his face and plunged ahead, bent over against the force of the gale. He had gone scarce a hundred yards when something he noticed on the ice ahead brought him to a dumfounded halt.

It was a little patch of snow packed hard by the pressure of a human foot. He

dropped to his knees and examined the track, and from his lips there burst a vehement stream of curses. The tiny corrugations in the compressed snow informed him that the foot which tramped it down was encased in a rubber shoe-pac.

"Rubber! Rubber at this time of year!" he fumed. "Of all the infernal chechalkers this bird takes the cake!"

Charley's anger and disgust could have been no greater had the man offended directly against him. But in addition to informing him that the man was a stranger in the North, the track also told him that the man was lost—was headed up-river he knew not where.

Charley lowered his head and rushed on like a mad bull; he ran, following the tracks, hoping to overtake the man before the storm drove him to the shelter of the timber. Several times the tracks turned into the bank and out again, and Charley knew the fellow was looking for dry wood with which to build a fire.

He raced ahead, confident of finding him in the first patch of dead timber. The tracks again turned up the bank, and Charley followed and came upon his man huddled at the base of a big birch, vainly trying to set fire to a heap of green spruce boughs. He wore no parka, but a heavy coonskin overcoat enveloped his short, squat figure, and a beaver cap topped his head. His plump, round face was bare, and the nose, the chin and the points of the cheeks were as white as the snow on the ground.

"Nice day, stranger," Charley greeted him.

The man sprang to his feet and cried out wildly:

"Oh, my —, I'm freezing! A fire, quick! Help me light a fire!"

His eyes were dilated with terror, and his voice quaked with the fear of death.

"Want a fire, eh! Well, why in — don't you light something that'll burn!"

Charley ripped a strip of bark from the

trunk of the birch and stuck a match to it. It flared up like powder, and in less than thirty seconds he had a roaring fire going.

"My feet are freezing," the little man whined.

"Huh, that's strange! Kick off them — rubbers and be quick about it."

Charley examined the feet and grunted his approval.

"Nipped a little, but not bad yet. Crawl into these."

He passed the other man his extra pair of moccasins. "Now rub your face with snow."

"My face don't hurt any more. It's all right."

"Rub it, I say. It's froze hard as a bone!"

"Oh, I guess it's all right."

Charley sprang in front of him with doubled fists.

"Now see here, 'Fats,' if I've gotta mother you out of this mess you're goin' to do as I say! Rub that face!"

Fats was cowed by the threatening attitude of the big man and immediately began to rub, but howled with pain when the blood again began to circulate through the frost-nipped flesh. Charley stood over him and laughed and verbally abused him as an ignoramus and a quitter.

Fats explained that he had left the Husky Creek camp two days ago and was headed for Mooseville, intending to go with the first mail-team to Fairbanks.

Charley fixed a comfortable camp—a lean-to of spruce boughs with a green-log fire in front—and they spent the night there. The next morning the wind had subsided, and the snow, too, had ceased; but the cold was even more intense.

Charley knew by the sullen, black-clouded sky overhead that it was only a lull in the storm. The last of his provisions were consumed for breakfast, and he knew that they must push on toward his camp without delay before additional snow came to impede travel further.

WHEN daylight was bright overhead they started out—Charley plowing through the snow ahead, Fats following behind, his only pack a double-barreled shotgun slung across his arm. Charley tried to persuade him to leave this behind.

"You got no use for that blunderbuss," he declared, "and you'll need every ounce of strength you got to keep your legs moving before we hit camp tonight."

But Fats kept his gun.

The moment the two men emerged on to the river a flock of ravens swept up from a clump of spruce and followed them, circling back and forth above their heads with a swish of wings, and their strange, sepulchral croak sounding like the gurgle of water poured from a bottle. For three hours the birds hovered above them, now sweeping down to almost within arm's reach and then mounting high in the air, their black bodies but faintly discernible against the somber sky. And ever the air rang with their melancholy cries.

The ravens got on Fats' nerves; he began to curse them soundly and tried to frighten them away by brandishing his gun when they swept down close. Once he threw the weapon to his shoulder intending to shoot; but Charley stopped him with a quick command.

"Cut that out, chechalker!" he ordered. "Don't you know better'n to shoot at them birds? It's bad luck to kill a raven. They are the souls of dead trappers."

Fats laughed derisively at Charley's superstition.

"I don't care a hang whose souls they are," he declared, "the next one that tries to knock my cap off will get blowed to smithereens."

They took a short cut through a neck of woods and came out on a back-water slough. The croaking birds, following over the tree-tops, once more swept low to the men. Fats threw up his gun and fired.

"Ha, ha! There's one of your — black

souls!" he laughed as one of the birds plumped like a stone to the ice.

He ran out to one side to examine it. Charley trudged on straight ahead until a moment later a distant, muffled cry caused him to turn quickly. Fats was nowhere in sight. Again the muffled cry, and Charley ran back in the direction from whence it came.

Fats' shotgun lay in the snow across a round, black hole in the ice, and the screams of Fats emanated from below. Charley looked down and saw him. The slough was dry. The crust of ice had frozen in the Fall, and the water beneath had seeped away, and Fats was buried to his waist in the mud and slime on the bottom.

By the help of a slender pole Charley rescued him from the mud, carried him to the timber and kindled a fire. Fats howled with pain, declaring that his leg was broken.

Charley determined, however, that his only injury was a sprained ankle, the result of his impact with the frozen surface of the mud on the bottom. But at any rate Fats was unable to walk and was wet from his waist down. An hour was spent in drying clothes, and by that time it had commenced to snow again.

Charley knew they were in a bad mess. He was faced by the prodigious task of carrying the contemptible Fats to camp or leaving him there to die. They could not remain there, for they had no food; and every hour of delay added to the difficulty of travel. They must go at once.

But Fats' moccasins were not yet dry. For another half-hour Charley held them before the fire. When the steam no longer rose from the damp moosehide he decided they would do; he would take a chance. He took off his own dry moccasins and threw them in Fats' face.

"You ornery, boneheaded skunk," he growled, "I ought to leave you here—for the birds to feed on your dirty carcass. Get into those moccasins."

Fats, cowering in the folds of his big overcoat, meekly complied, and Charley put on the damp footgear. When their feet were dressed he threw Fats across his back as he might have shouldered a quarter of meat, and set off once more up the river.

In a very short while the moccasin on his right foot was as stiff as a wooden shoe.

"Huh," he muttered, "was afraid of that."

He did not pause but kept on, wriggling his toes vigorously. The foot in the frozen moccasin began to pain him. Darkness fell, and he still trudged on. Fats put up a pitiful plea to stop—he was freezing to death—the pain in his ankle was killing him—but Charley was deaf to his pleading, for his own mind was tortured by a great uncertainty.

His right foot had been cold, very cold, but now it no longer hurt. Had it warmed up, or was it numb? Somehow it did not feel like the other. Was that heavy, dead feeling the result of his tremendous exertion or was it— He forced the horrible thought from his mind and staggered on in the darkness. The man on his back continued to moan and the falling snow like an evil wraith enveloped him, filled his eyes and his nostrils, and piled in ever deepening drifts across the way ahead.

A MAN less versed in woodcraft than Soogan Charley might have found it difficult to locate his cabin in the storm and darkness even when he arrived opposite it, but Charley was not to be fooled. At exactly the right place he turned off from the river, dragged himself and his burden up the bank and into the cabin. He was home at last. He threw Fats on to the bunk and built a fire in the sheet-iron stove, filled the coffee-pot with chopped ice, and put a loaf of bread and a chunk of meat into the oven to thaw.

Then he sat down and felt of his numb foot. It was indeed numb. He cut the strings of the moccasin and bared the foot.

The flesh from the ankle down was as hard and cold as the foot of a marble statue. He fetched a pan of snow, placed the foot in it and began to rub vigorously.

Fats raised up on the bed and threw off his overcoat.

"I'm hungry!" he whined. "Can't you bring me something to eat?"

"Keep your shirt on! There'll be some grub ready in a minute."

Charley continued to rub his foot. For many moments he worked at it steadily. Fats again became impatient.

"What you doing? Did your toes get nipped?"

"Reckon they did."

Charley ceased rubbing the foot and again examined it, pinching it here and there and bending the toes with his fingers. Finally he drew the sock back on and went about preparing supper.

For hours that night the sleepless Fats, writhing with the pain of his injured ankle, listened to the breathing of the big man beside him and envied Soogan Charley his deep, untroubled sleep.

Several times the following day Charley removed his moccasin and examined the injured foot. Fats noticed that he limped when he placed it to the floor.

"Toes hurt you?" he inquired.

"Yep. Some."

"Well, you can thank your stars you haven't got a sprained ankle. You'd know what real pain was if you did have."

Toward evening Charley took an old handsaw from a peg on the wall and spent an hour filing it and cleaning the rust from the sides.

That night it was Charley who writhed in pain, and Fats fretted peevishly because it kept him awake. When morning came Charley got up and prepared breakfast for Fats. He ate nothing himself. Fats saw that his right foot was swathed in a cloth, and that he hobbled painfully about the room.

"You look sick," he remarked. "How are the toes coming?"

"They are coming, and damn quick too. Can you get up today?"

"Guess I could if necessary."

"Well, it's necessary. Roll out and get your clothes on."

With a great deal of grumbling Fats sat on the edge of the bunk dressing when he noticed Bill put a pan of water on the stove and place the old saw in it.

"What the deuce are you up to now?"

"You and I are going to do a little butchering today," Charley answered with a sickly grin, and began to whet a razor.

"Butchering! Are you crazy? Where's there anything to butcher——"

He suddenly started upright to his feet entirely forgetful of the injured ankle in the horror of the thought that had burst upon him.

"Let me see—let me see— Your foot! Oh, my God!"

Charley had drawn away the cloth and exposed to view his frozen foot, swollen to twice its normal size and a ghastly blue-black in color. Fats sank back groaning upon the bed and buried his face in the robes. Bill calmly went on with his honing.

When the water in the pan boiled he placed the razor in it and called to Fats. The only answer was another groan. Charley snatched a stick of wood from the pile back of the stove and heaved it against Fats' ribs.

"Come out of that, you white-livered runt. None of your baby antics go around here!"

"No, no! I won't! I can't do it! You sha'n't do it—it isn't necessary—I'll get a doctor!"

"Another blat out of you and I'll cave your head in!"

Charley hobbled toward the bed, the handle of a huge double-bitt ax clutched in his hands.

"Get up now, and do as I say. It's got

to be done—done now. Tomorrow will be too late.”

Fats did as he was told. Charley climbed on to the bed and leaned the ax beside it. At his directions Fats placed a clean strip of canvas beneath him, fetched a roll of bandages from a chest in a corner and helped fasten a rawhide band about the injured leg which they twisted tight with a short stick.

“Now bring the razor. Cut in there and there and——”

But Fats’ nerve was gone. His hands were trembling and beyond control.

Soogan Charley took the razor from him and himself cut into the blackened flesh. Fats sank in a moaning heap on the floor. When the bone was exposed Charley again spoke, between clenched teeth—

“Get the saw.”

Fats brought the saw, but again fell in a heap on the floor—

“I can’t! I can’t!” he moaned.

“For God’s saake, man, saw! You’re killing me!”

Fats only groaned. Charley swung the big ax above his head.

“Saw, damn you, saw! I’ll split you in two!”

Fear of death alone gave Fats nerve and strength to draw the blade back and forth until the blackened foot came free.

Ten days later a prospector from the village, on his way down the Zimba, found

them there and hauled them down to Mooseville. Charley was well on the road to recovery.

“AND it was a plumb good amputation,” old Sam finished. “Just a little trimming here and there was all the additional carving necessary. Fats went on to Fairbanks with the first outgoing mail-team and, Charley has never seen him since.”

“Never seen or heard from his since!” I mused sarcastically. “Well, I guess that’s about the usual run of human appreciation. Poor old Charley! How the deuce does he make a living now?”

“Oh, I never said he hadn’t heard from Fats,” Old Sam corrected me. “And Charley don’t have to work. He owns the new trading-post up yonder, and two more like it up country. He’s mighty well heeled.

“You see, about three months after Fats left, Charley got a letter from him from Chicago—a mushy sort of thing thanking Charley for what he’d done—didn’t amount to anything—but pinned to it was a check signed ‘Ole Yensen.’

“That saphead Fats person happened to be the son of the new owner of the Husky Creek mines. The check was to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars. Shucks! I’d cash in one of my old pegs for half of that.”

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DEATH WAITS FOR A DOG DRIVER



by SAMUEL TAYLOR

Into the Alaska Sweepstakes drove Kelly and before he returned lead would fly, and death would stalk the wind-swept Arctic.

JOE KELLY sent a wire from Seattle, Wednesday:

YEAR IS UP. WIRE THOUSAND DOLLARS TO GET MARRIED ON.

No answer from Nome. Kelly sent another wire Thursday, a third Friday. A reply came Saturday morning, but not sending money:

KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON. YOUR WIRES DELAYED IN SEARCH FOR EDWARD P. CANN. YOU SHOULD HAVE ADDRESSED ME TIN CAN ED AS I HAVE BEEN KNOWN AROUND

NOME FOR FORTY YEARS. YEAR IS NOT UP UNTIL NEXT FRIDAY. ANYHOW I AM NOT SENDING NO THOUSAND DOLLARS BECAUSE I HAVE NOT GOT IT. EVERYTHING INCLUDING THE CROSS EYED DOG BET ON SWEEPSTAKES STARTING TOMORROW.

Ginger, the big malemute sled dog, rumbled a low whine as his master exploded. "The blasted old double-crossing crook!" bawled Joe Kelly. "Everything bet on the sweepstakes, is it! Including

the Cross Eyed Dog, huh! We'll see about that!"

He glanced manevolently around at the cracked plaster of his cheap room. "I go on my own a year. I live in a dump like this and pinch pennies. And that blasted old fool bets my money *and* the Cross Eyed Dog on the Sweepstakes! Like hell he does!"

The tawny malemute growled again. Kelly flopped down at the rickety table and began composing a wire that would burn the ears off old Tin Can Ed. Ginger kept growling, and Joe realized somebody was knocking at the door. A lean fellow was in the dim hallway, a man with sun-blackened face blending with the shadows, eyes paler than the tanned skin.

"A message for you," the man said, extending an envelope.

Kelly took it, then stumbled backwards as the pale-eyed man cracked out a fist. Dimly, Joe Kelly heard Ginger's snarl, saw the tawny malemute leap at the attacker and rebound against the slammed door. But the sap was out of Kelly's knees from the blow. When he could get up and open the door, the murky hallway was empty.

"Nice, polite guy," Kelly mused, rubbing his jaw. "Somewhere—I've seen that ugly face of his before."

The envelope contained a penciled note:

Mind your business, Joe Kelly. And stay away from Nome.

Kelly's lean face smiled tightly. He rummaged through the drawer of the rickety table until he found an old letter from Tin Can Ed, spread it out side by side with the note.

The writing was the same.

"One of those things, is it?" Kelly mused. "Tin Can Ed is making his own play, and don't want me busting in to spoil it, huh? We'll see about that."

An hour later Kelly was winging north, Ginger lying on the floor of the low-winged cabin plane beside him. In the year

he'd been on his own, earning his own way, Kelly hadn't had the money to fly his plane more than enough to keep his license good. He'd had to give a note, secured by the plane, for gas to make this trip.

"So old Tin Can Ed will keep me out of Nome, huh?" he rumbled above the drone of the engine. "The devil he will!"

WHEN the sun went down he was in a new country, a snow-fast land where the iron hand of Nature made mockery of man's feeble attempts at civilized comfort. The rubber tires of the plane slithered into a half skid on the packed snow of the Nome landing field. Half a dozen planes were parked around, owned probably by rich sportsmen come to see the Sweepstakes. Kelly taxied over in line.

A chubby young fellow in grease-stained canvas parka sauntered over as Kelly followed the dog out.

The chubby one said, "I can put skis on your plane tonight. It'd be just too bad if you was forced down in loose snow with wheels."

Kelly shook his head, pulled the parka hood up over his ears. He'd donned his old caribou parka, hide pants and fur-lined boots enroute. It was bitter, up here in the snow, with the sun down. The caribou parka was a bit snug. He'd filled out a lot in the seven years he'd been Outside.

"Can't afford it," Kelly said.

The chubby one shrugged, took a slow look around, then lighted a cigarette and muttered into his cupped hands:

"Listen, Joe Kelly, watch your step in Nome."

The cupped hands came down. Joe Kelly looked at a chubby moon face entirely without expression.

"Oh, hello, Tubby," Joe said.

The moon face flashed a quick grin, sobered. "Didn't figure you'd remember me, Joe. I was only a shaver when you went Outside. But I ain't never forgot that day you knocked Cinch Gavin's gold tooth

down his throat for bullyin' me. That's why I'm warnin' you."

"All right, Tubby. Spill it."

"I don't know much, Joe. I just happened to overhear Cinch Gavin yesterday in the Long Bar. He owns the Long Bar, now. And he's just as crooked as he used to be. He's goin' to stop you from running in the Sweepstakes tomorrow."

"Stop me?" Joe asked. "Why, I ain't runnin' the dog race."

Tubby's plump shoulders shrugged inside the grease-stained parka. "That's all I know, Joe."

Kelly pondered while he was draining the oil of his engine. Tubby helped him. "Tubby," Kelly finally asked, "do you know anything about old Tin Can Ed betting the Cross Eyed Dog on the 'Stakes?'"

"Sure. Tin Can Ed bet the Cross Eyed Dog against fifty thousand, yesterday—with Cinch Gavin."

"With Cinch Gavin, eh? And yesterday. Old Tin Can *must* have got one of my wires before yesterday."

"Huh, Joe?"

"Just talking to myself, Tubby."

IT WAS dark when Kelly had his plane tended to. He crunched around the black shape of the hangar towards the town, Ginger trotting at his heels.

"Kelly!"

Three dark shapes at the rear of the hangar, men with faces muffled by parka hoods.

"Where you goin', Kelly?" one of them asked.

"To town. Why?"

"You ain't goin' to town, Kelly. You're climbin' back inside that plane and headin' south again. Right now."

"Or else?"

The answer came in action. "Get 'em, boy!" Joe called to the tawny malemute, and met the first man with swinging fist. Knuckles cracked against flesh and the charging man pitched limply. Then Joe

ducked as a club whistled. The bludgeon smashed sickeningly against his shoulder, numbing his left side. Joe leaped instead of away, warded the club, knew his right fist contacted the point of a jaw, whirled the other way and then went down with the Aurora and the whole Milky Way exploding before his eyes.

He came to in a little room stifling from the heat of an oil drum converted into a stove. Moon-faced Tubby was sitting on an iron keg, watching. Joe sat up, trying to shake off the lead hammer that seemed to be slugging his head. Ginger advanced from the corner. One side of the dog's head was caked with blood.

"You see I wasn't foolin' you any, Joe," Tubby observed.

"No, you weren't," Joe admitted. "Neither were those three apes. And," he added, getting up, "neither am I."

JOE KELLY crunched along the beaten snow of a narrow street, rubbing shoulders with bearded sourdoughs, hawk-nosed Indians, moon-faced Eskimos, 'breeds of all degree. With his old Arctic outfit, Kelly looked like one of them. More than one feminine head turned as the broad-shouldered man swung by the lighted windows, and more than one sourdough stopped, blinked, at this one who looked so much like old Mike Kelly had been, years ago.

He turned into the Long Bar, a huge place doing a roaring business the night before the race. A crowd was hanging around a blackboard on the side wall, making bets which a bald-headed man was chalking up. A quarter-slot phonograph roared out the latest tune flown up *via* Anchorage. Waiters with high-held trays darted among the mob. Coming up in the world, Cinch Gavin, owning a joint like this.

One line of the blackboard said, "Tin Can Ed's team to win, Cross Eyed Dog against \$50,000."

A snarl rumbled from the tawny male-

mute, and Ginger's tawny shape lunged across the room.

"Ginger!"

The dog stopped, bristling.

"Don't do it, Cinch!"

A tall man, lean and pale, had snatched out a derringer from somewhere when the dog began charging. It was Cinch Gavin. He was by the big cast-iron stove with another man—a man with a sun-blackened face contrasting to pale eyes.

Cinch Gavin slipped the derringer into his palm, and smiled, displaying even white teeth except for a gold tooth in front. "Hello, Joe," he said as Kelly advanced. "Take your dog outside."

"I'm looking for Tin Can Ed," Kelly advised. "And, Cinch, you'd better get the sleeve of that shirt sewed up. Looks like a dog bit you. Was it up by the plane hangar?"

Cinch Gavin pulled the removable gold bridge from his mouth and kept smiling. "And you stay outside, *with* the dog," he advised. "You'll find Tin Can Ed at the Ten Mile."

Kelly turned to the deeply tanned man with the pale eyes.

"Hello, Dal Denegree. You've traveled some today, same as me. Down in Seattle, I didn't place you. Up here, I remember. We used to do some fightin', when we was kids together up here."

"So long, Joe," said Dal Denegree.

"So long, Dal."

Joe Kelly cracked out a fist to the point of Denegree's lean jaw.

"Now we're even, Dal."

Cinch Gavin kept smiling. He let the derringer slip from his palm until his finger was on the trigger.

A circle of spectators formed quickly. Dal Denegree shoved himself from the floor, hate glowing coldly from the blue-ice eyes. Then, tensed to spring, his glance went beyond Kelly, and Dal Denegree relaxed.

Following the direction of the pale eyes,

Joe saw a girl pushing through the spectators—a pretty girl, frost still on her eyebrows from the cold outside, cheeks stung red, parka hood back to reveal blonde curls, and:

"Why, it's Anita Cann!" exploded Joe Kelly with pleased surprise. "Little Anita, grown up into this! How are you?"

The daughter of Tin Can Ed brushed by him, saying sharply: "I see you're the same brawling kid, Joe Kelly. You haven't grown up any except in size. . . . Dal," she said to Denegree, "Come on. We have a thousand things to do before tomorrow."

Kelly went out and headed for the Ten Mile. He kept his fists closed.

THE Ten Mile was a smaller edition of the Long Bar. Joe asked a waiter, headed for the rear and went through a door into a little back room.

Tin Can Ed was at the single table with a bottle by his elbow. The light gleamed on his bald head. Joe Kelly's fists opened. He'd come into knock Tin Can Ed down, then talk. But he could do neither. Tin Can Ed was half sprawled on the table, sleeping off a drunk. Kelly knew he couldn't have hit him, anyhow. For the seven years that had filled out the frame of Joe Kelly had silvered the hair fringe around Tin Can Ed's ears and larded him with fat.

"With that belly," Joe muttered aloud. "How in the devil does he expect to win the Sweepstakes?"

"The desperate act of a desperate man," spoke a voice behind in answer. Kelly turned to see a big man with a square, red face, who had come in from the front room. His heavy jaw was clamped on a long, dead cigar.

"Hello, Funk."

"Howdy, Joe," said Saul Funk. He was a mining man, a promotor with a finger in several pies. "I tried to stop him, Joe," Funk said, indicating the drunken man with his cigar. "But there's no stopping

Tin Can Ed when he's in a hole. If he'd come to me, I'd have given him more money to get the Cross Eyed Dog reopened."

"Reopened? What do you mean, reopened? When did the mine close down? Why?"

Saul Funk shifted his cigar, watching Joe Kelly with little eyes deep in the heavy face. He said, "Ed couldn't tell you, Joe. He's that kind. Your dad died a year ago, Joe. Old Mike Kelly cashed in his chips. Him and Tin Can Ed was partners when they found the Cross Eyed Dog mine. They kept on being partners, sharing fifty-fifty, when Mike Kelly, your dad, took you Outside to send you to college and civilize you. Tin Can Ed stayed up and managed the mine, sending your dad a half share of the profits. Then Mike Kelly took sick—"

"Sure, I know that, Funk," broke in Joe Kelly. "Dad knew his hand was played out. He showed me the letter he was sending to Tin Can Ed, just before the last. The letter said for Ed to hold up my share of the profits for a year, and give me the money then only if I'd made my own way, kept free from debt, and stayed single. Dad didn't like Esther, my girl friend. Claimed she was after my money. Well, I might have gone to court about it, but because Dad wanted it, I did make my own way a year, and didn't get married. But the year's up, and when I wire Tin Can Ed, here, for money, he sends word back that he's bet everything, even my half of the mine, on this damned dog race starting tomorrow. I've a good mind to have him thrown in the can and the bet cancelled. He can't get away with that!"

Saul Funk shifted the long cigar again. "Yes he can, Joe. He's got full legal charge of the Cross Eyed Dog, to do what he wants with it. Anyhow, he was desperate when you wired for a thousand dollars. He'd been hoping he could get things going again during the year since your father

died. He had to have money, and a lot of money. He didn't come to me, because he already owed me. He went to Cinch Gavin for money, and Cinch turned him down. Then Ed offered to bet the mine against fifty grand, and Cinch took it up. That's where things stand, Joe. Old Ed has got to win the Sweepstakes. He done it three times in the old days. But this time. . . ." Funk's red face wagged negatively as he looked at the man draped over the table. "Fat," he said. "And gray."

"How come?" Joe asked. "How come he owed you money, and tried to borrow from Cinch Gavin? Has the old fool been bucking a big poker game with my money? Tin Can Ed always was a fool for draw poker—and a fool at it."

Saul Funk shrugged beefy shoulders. "I'd better tell you. You know the Cross Eyed Dog is sunk into the side of a hill. Well, two years ago, just after your dad took sick, we had a big thaw after a heavy winter of snow. The whole side of that hill slipped, Joe, shearing the tunnel, carrying the dump and buildings down into the ravine. Tin Can Ed spent all his dough trying to find that vein again—and borrowed money besides. But the Cross Eyed Dog is still one good mine, Joe. It's good enough, lost, for Cinch Gavin to bet fifty grand against it."

"Well, why the devil didn't I hear about it?" Joe demanded.

"Your dad was sick when it happened, Joe. And Ed figured on getting things going again, before your year was up."

"The blasted old fool, betting the mine on a dog race!"

"You won't figure him a fool when you see his dog team. The best in the country. He's got a chance."

Joe Kelly swore. "Not with that belly—and gray hair!" Then Joe cocked an eye. "Would Ed be crook enough to fix it with Cinch Gavin? Lose the mine to Gavin, then the pair of 'em whack up?"

A PUDGY red hand removed the cigar. "Don't be a fool, Joe," Saul Funk growled. "You used to be hell on wheels on a dog trail. And you're in shape. Tin Can Ed has kept track of how you've played pro football, and run them short dog races during the winter in the Washington mountains. You're in shape. Why d'you figure Ed sent Dal Denegree with that note, to deliver it with a sock in the jaw?"

Joe Kelly then began cursing, while beefy Saul Funk grinned.

"Sure," chuckled the red-faced man. "You're bull-headed like your Dad was. Tin Can Ed knew the only way to get you up here was to warn you to stay away. It's you who are going to be at the sledge handles of Ed's team in the morning, Joe. And you've got to win!"

Joe Kelly felt of the lump on his head where he had been clubbed at the hangar. Saul Funk knew Tin Can Ed's play. So did others. Joe had to win—but there were others who knew Joe was to run the Sweepstakes, and would do anything to keep him out. They knew his abilities. He'd come second in the Sweepstakes eight years before, when he was only a stripling. Grown up, he'd be hard to stop by fair means.

Considering the size of the stakes, would the means be fair?

JOE KELLY carried Tin Can Ed home on his shoulder. The jolting ride sobered the older man a bit. At the house, Joe brewed strong coffee. "Pull out of it, Ed," he advised. "Saul Funk told me the play you made. Now, pull out of it and be of some help."

"I'm a yellow dog, Joe," Ed muttered into the coffee cup. "But it's the only way out. I know you can win the race. And with the dough we win, we'll have the Cross Eyed Dog roarin' again in jig time. The race is in the bag, Joe, with you at the sledge and my team of huskies. In the

bag, Joe. Look, I've been trainin' 'em all winter."

"Don't look like it, with that belly."

"But I made 'em pull me, see?" Coffee and enthusiasm were sobering the man. His grizzled face beamed. "With me on the sledge I started trainin' them, when snow began to fly last autumn. Fifteen, twenty miles at first, an' gradually increasin' the trips. Now—why, Joe, that there team can go nigh a hundred mile on a dead run. And you remember that great lead dog, Fibber, they called him? Well, I got his son, Bozo, to lead my team. And Bozo is better than old Fibber, or I'll eat him without salt an' pepper."

"Let's see that team," Joe said skeptically. But the enthusiasm of old Tin Can Ed was catching. Running the Sweepstakes again, with a great team! And a great wager in the balance! Four hundred miles of tough going, fighting Nature, fighting the other racers. And his future in the balance. Winning—riches, security, everything money buys. He thought of Esther. He'd phoned her in Seattle before hopping into the plane, told her to be ready for the honeymoon when he got back. Losing the race—he'd be without a dime. And he couldn't ask a girl like Esther to marry a pauper.

The size of the stakes made Joe's blood run hot as he followed Tin Can Ed outside and around to the back to the kennels.

Dogs were jumping against their chains at the little houses. Ed's flashlight slowly swept the line one by one.

"Not so bad, huh, Joe?"

Joe Kelly whistled. Big, eager brutes with glistening coats, trained to a fighting hair, tail plumes high. "Dogs! What dogs!" Joe exclaimed. "Say, with this bunch it's a walkaway. But it'll take a leader to control this mob. Which one is Bozo?"

Slowly, as if saving the best for the last, Ed swung the flashlight beam onto a dog house set a bit apart from the others.

Then old Tin Can Ed was scrambling that way, breathing hard. Joe Kelly followed. Ed crawled inside the dog house with the light. With his mittened hand Joe fumbled at the chain stake, pulled the chain until he could feel the end link—sawed through, twisted open.

Tin Can Ed crawled out of the little house, his grizzled face stunned to a dumb mask.

"I—Joe—somebody—Bozo, he's *gone!*" He repeated it: "Gone. Bozo gone," as if he couldn't understand. "And me—I left the team alone—went down to the Ten Mile an' got drunk—"

Kelly turned away. He couldn't call old Ed any names. Ed was calling himself plenty. Anyhow, Joe didn't feel so bad as the old man. Joe had an ace in the hole—Ginger. The tawny malemute was without experience in long races, to be sure, but he had shown up well in short runs.

"Quit blubbering, Ed," Joe Kelly advised. "We're not licked until the race is finished."

ANITA CANN was pretty as a button next morning, all dressed in white furs, holding a scepter carved from a walrus tusk, sitting regally as Queen of the Sweepstakes on a bedecked sledge drawn by a dozen grinning young bucks yelping like dogs. She was smiling until she met Joe's eye.

Joe Kelly had registered the dogs with the Kennel Club for the race. Ginger was in harness as leader, proud of his position—but a strange dog to the team, a new dog to the gruelling course. And the draw had put Joe in the lead position. He had to break trail, couldn't follow anybody.

Handsome Cinch Gavin, the gambler, was running a team of Missouri hound dogs, floppy-eared brutes, very fast, but without the tough endurance of the native strain. Cinch had drawn third spot, and Dal Denegree fourth. Waiting for the start, Joe left his team with Tin Can Ed and

walked down the line. The racing outfits were spaced down the street with everybody in town lined up on either side.

Cinch Gavin flashed his gold tooth in a smile, saying, "Joe, I feel sorry for you, me with this team of Missouri hound dogs."

"Start feeling sorry for yourself if we hit a blizzard," Kelly advised shortly, and went on to Denegree's outfit. Dal's pale eyes looked sullenly from the sun-blackened face.

Joe said, "Dal, I guess there was a misunderstanding. I know why you cracked me in the jaw, down at Seattle. Want to shake hands?"

"Git away from here, you pink-fingered society boy," Dal Denegree said flatly. "I done that much for Tin Can Ed because I like him. But it's *him* I like. Beat it."

"I can't figure you, Dal," Joe admitted. He was thinking of how obviously in love Dal Denegree was with Anita Cann. Yet Denegree was in the race—and if Denegree should beat Kelly, then Tin Can Ed and Anita would lose the Cross Eyed Dog mine. It just didn't add up.

Joe walked down to the end of the line. Eleven teams entered in the gruelling four-hundred mile race. Every man with his eye on that big prize, most of them with side bets. And on the sidelines were diamond stickpins and big cigars. Big shot gamblers were here in droves.

Not a race for weaklings, nor the squeamish.

Joe went back to his dogs. Tin Can Ed was looking fondly at his daughter there at the head of the line as Queen of the Sweepstakes.

"Ain't she the purty one, though!" the grizzled old sourdough said fondly. He turned to Joe, swiping a fur sleeve across his eyes, and said, "Joe, Anita has growed up. She's a woman, now, and even if I say it myself, she's a knockout. Joe, I want to send her Outside. Dal Denegree's all right, but—well I want Anita to see

what the world is like before she marries and settles down anywhere."

One more reason for winning.

"Git ready, Joe," Ed was saying. "They're ready to start. Too bad you've got to bust trail. Good luck, boy."

The gun went off. Joe's huskies swung across the line and onto the long race.

KELLY was too far out to hear the pistol shot for the next starter, fifteen minutes later. A thaw followed by a freeze had made a crust on the snow, and his team ate up the miles over the hard surface. But this sort of going was made to order for those Missouri hound dogs Cinch Gavin was driving.

Along about noon the crust had softened, the day became gray with snow smelling in the air. But going was still good, for Kelly was on the ocean ice, headed for Solomon. In the lead, Ginger's tawny plume bobbed proudly. There was a source of worry ended. Kelly hadn't known how the strange dogs would take a new leader. But they made no fuss about it.

Kelly reported at Solomon with a yell, and kept on without rest. He was breaking out the trail ahead of the dogs, now, with snowshoes—and making an easy trail for the ones behind to follow. Then as night came on a wind brought snow, and that equalized things. Kelly fought up the Topock Divide in the teeth of a gale, a line around his shoulders helping the dogs. The iron trail stakes were like toothpicks, thin and black against the snow-filled air. Then he howled down into Council with the wind screaming through the rods of the sledge.

"Stop here!" a figure yelled as Kelly went by the Council station. "Orders from Nome. Stop here until the storm blows out a little!"

Kelly kept on and the figure ran to head the dogs. Kelly was too miserable from snow burning up his wrists and past his

parka hood—too miserable to argue. He knocked the man down and kept on. He wasn't stopping until he had to. Too much at stake.

But he wished he had stopped, when he was ten miles beyond, when his mukluks began sloshing in mushy wet snow. An overflow—water coming over the ice of the Fish River up which he was traveling. Dogs with wet feet.

And fighting dogs!

Ginger was too green at the game to know what to do at an overflow. He barged straight ahead into the slush, and instantly the following team lost confidence in the judgment of the leader. The second dog ripped fangs at Ginger. Ginger came around, fighting, and then the whole team was in a tangled ball of action—wallowing in the snow mush, fighting as only Northern dogs can fight. The team was tearing itself to pieces. Joe lumbered around to them through the slush, kicking, clubbing with the butt of his long whip. He had to have live dogs, not dead ones; strong ones, not dogs crippled with wounds from razor fangs—and every dog registered with the Kennel Club at the start of the race must finish, either in harness or on the sledge.

Kelly jerked one dog aside, laid a boot into the side of another, parried with a blow of the whip handle the snap of white fangs. Cursing, he straightened the team out, got it onto the bank out of the overflow, went about cleaning the caked ice from between the dogs' toes. Had to keep going now, or freeze.

"Mush!"

But rebellion flared in the string of dogs. They had no more confidence in this outside leader, Ginger. Snarling, they braced in their tracks. Kelly snapped the lash over their heads. No use. He started around the sledge with his whip handle clubbed.

And then Ginger showed that he still had something of the blood of his ancestors. A swipe of teeth ripped him free of

the harness line. He braced, bristling, snarling a challenge to the second dog. And then they fought. By some means of dog language, the others knew this was a private affair. Ginger fought until the other dog tried to scramble away with tail between legs; then Ginger challenged the next one. Down the line the tawny male-mute went, and whipped every last one of his eight team-mates. Then he took his place at the lead, and waited for Kelly to hook him to the line.

But Kelly left him loose. For those eight fights had left Ginger with only three good legs. Crushing teeth had clamped on the left fore-paw, leaving it limp and bloody.

"On the sledge for you, Ginger."

But fangs showed when Kelly tried to pick the dog up. Joe cuffed the dog, grabbed it up, carried the struggling ball of fur to the sledge, stuffed it in the sleeping bag.

"Mush!"

The dogs looked around uncertainly; then they started. But the dog now in lead wasn't born for it. He kept looking around in the driving snow. He wasn't a leader. And the others could feel that uncertainty. They lagged in the traces.

A snarl of fury, rip of hide and hair, and Ginger bounded out of the fur sleeping bag, scrambled off the sledge and up towards the front of the team.

"If the blame fool would only rest that leg awhile!" cursed Kelly. "Ginger!" he barked.

Ginger didn't return. Joe repeated the call. When a dog won't obey, you've got to keep after it, regardless, until it does. Or you lose your control forever.

"Ginger!" bawled Joe Kelly. "Gin—" His voice died off, and the snow-cake of his face cracked as he smiled. Ginger was not in harness—but he was still leading the team! He was running ahead, calling to them, picking a trail. And the dogs were following with all their hearts!

"Mush, Ginger!"

THE snow quit falling about midnight, and a couple of hours later the wind was gone. Kelly was reeling in his tracks. But he kept on until he knew his heart would explode the next step, and then soon he had his second wind, just as he knew he would have. It always came, if you kept on. You got beyond fatigue.

Kelly didn't stop until he came at day-break to the little station at the head of the Kiwalik, one of the places where Tin Can Ed had previously cached sealed tins of dog food.

Then Kelly fed the dogs, ate himself, and slept. Like many men, Kelly had some sort of a clock inside his head. He woke up on the dot of noon, ready to go again.

"You slept like you didn't have a care in the world," the sourdough at the station declared.

Kelly nodded, grinning. Some of the best of the Sweepstakes runners believed in taking a real rest and stopping but few times. In the old days, Scotty Allan didn't do so bad that way.

"Four ahead of you," the sourdough continued. "Smith with his Siberians, Drag Ingraham, Arch Lewis, an' Cinch Gavin. You should of seen Cinch pile through here like a freight train! Say, Cinch was goin' at a dead run. He just waved as he mushed by. Them Missouri hound dogs he drives are *plenty* fast."

Kelly hitched up, mushed north down the Kiwalik. That didn't set so well about Cinch Gavin. Kelly had figured those Missouri dogs would be dead fagged by the time they got to the Kiwalik station. Joe wasn't so worried about the other three who had passed him. Not with the team he had, and with Ginger running loose leader and picking the best trail, probing for soft spots on the ice with the good fore-paw, leading the way around undercut portions of the river ice, avoiding treacherous overflows invisible under the blanket of snow. And the trail the others had made was a help in itself. Kelly worried about nothing

but Cinch Gavin. Why didn't those hound dogs start slowing up? How could Cinch keep going on with those dogs—fast, but needing plenty of rest? How had they gone so fast through that blizzard?

From Nome to Candle—across the Seward Peninsula—and return, the course of the Sweepstakes embraces forest, mountains, plain, bad-lands, and ice of both river and sea. Three planes were sighted by Kelly during the day—sportsmen or gamblers, flying the course to get a picture of what was going on. At sundown he passed the third of those who had got ahead while he slept. But Cinch Gavin was somewhere beyond.

An hour later he sighted the Missouri hound dogs, coming at a dead head, long ears flapping—coming his way! Cinch, then, had reached Candle and was on the return trip, and from all calculations Kelly figured he was still eight miles from Candle. Cinch fifteen miles or so in the lead, and those hounds still going strong! It didn't add up. Fast dogs, yes, but not with that endurance.

Kelly rammed the brake claw home, stopped his team. The lean driver swung over a ways to windward to pass, made no signs of stopping.

Kelly called, but the other driver was in no mood for a chat. One fur-clad arm raised in salute; the Missouri hounds kept on full speed. Kelly's huskies rumbled growls as the scent of the other team crossed them. Kelly saw Ginger lying for a quick rest, eyeing the other team without emotion, lying peacefully . . . peacefully. . . .

The significance struck Joe Kelly suddenly. He made a run for the other driver. The man didn't realize he was chased until Kelly was almost upon him from the rear; then the lean figure whirled, clawing up under the lip of his parka for a weapon.

Kelly lunged atop him, bore him down, gripping the wiry wrist. The other man jerked his arm loose, bringing a shiny re-

volver into view, fired blindly before Kelly once more got a grip on the wrist. Then, with a man trying to kill him, Kelly really began to fight. In school he'd captained the college boxing team two years, but he forgot all that now—forgot all but what he'd learned about putting weight behind his fists—and reverted to the rough-and-tumble of the Northland. The other man was wiry, quick as a cat, treacherous as a rabid wolf. But when Kelly jerked the gun away and side-swiped the skull inside the parka hood, the lank one relaxed to the snow.

Kelly pulled the parka hood from the head, muttered: "I figured this one wasn't Cinch Gavin, when Ginger didn't growl. That dog don't like Cinch after the affair at the hangar."

The unconscious man was built a good deal like the gambler. He had Cinch Gavin's wiry lankness, and with parka hood almost covering the face it would be easy to get by.

THE unconscious man groaned, opened glazed eyes that slowly focused. Kelly figured sight of the revolver would help, especially when the guy was groggy.

"All right, mister," he advised. "Talk fast and complete."

"Plane," the man muttered, sitting up in the snow and feeling at the lump on his skull. "I met Cinch last night at a place near the trail, with this fresh team of hound dogs. He went by plane to just outside Candle, took these dogs in to register, drove out a couple miles and I took over while he flew back to where I'm to meet him again in the mornin'. That's all."

Kelly slashed the draw-line on the sledge, led the hounds to the rear of his own sledge. "Mush!" he barked, and started off, leading the hounds, leaving the ringer sitting there in the snow with a sledge but no dogs to pull it.

"Smart trick," Kelly growled. "Cinch running *two* teams of dogs and a relief

driver to go while he rested. That way, he could go full speed all the ways." And it was mere luck that Kelly had found it out. Just the fact that Ginger hadn't bristled at scent of the man. Otherwise. . . . But Kelly couldn't think about otherwise. He had to win. But that *was* smart of Cinch Gavin. No rule that a man has to check in at any of the way stations, except Candle. A fur-clad figure with a team of Missouri hounds, waving as he went by. . . .

Kelly released the hound dogs one at a time, spacing them a half mile apart. He was weary but grinning when he came into Candle, reported, and with but a half hour's rest started the two hundred miles of the return.

KELLY slept again during the day when the sun made snow mushy. Hot again; muggy; getting ready for another storm. One thing about the Sweepstakes, it always brought real testing weather. Kelly started again in late afternoon when the wind was beginning. The start was the hard part. Joints creaked like rusty hinges, and muscles screamed against action. But you went a mile, you cursed your half-dead dogs a mile, and then the heat of motion started running oil into your frame and it was all right. Everything a shade unreal, but all right.

By now all the racers had passed him, coming the other way, towards Candle. All but one. All but Dal Denegree. Nobody knew what had happened to Denegree.

"Denegree was third racer into Council," one way-station informed Kelly. "Then he plumb disappeared. Prob'ly trouble."

"Prob'ly," Kelly said. But he wondered.

The wind was a giant hand of white iron tearing at his fur clothing, adding pounds to the weight of his outfit with fine-driven snow wedged into the fur. Every little while he crawled up along his team, feeling at the mosquito-bar eye protectors, rabbit-fur pads to keep flanks

from freezing, checking harness, dislodging pads of hard snow from between the animals' toes. You've got to keep your dogs in shape, or you'll never win the Sweepstakes.

One thing, the wind was now at his back. He made time. Stakes marked the hard stretches of trail, with lanterns at the turns. It was black and yet somehow white in the blizzard. Sometime along close to dawn, when the night was its darkest, Ginger went crazy. The dog turned off the trail, started heading to the left instead of right where a lantern indicated a turn.

Kelly called the dog, pointed to the right, barked the order to go. Ginger went—to the left, away from the marking stakes. Kelly took the other dogs a half mile along the staked trail, returned for the mutinous leader.

The tawny malemute was by the lantern-stake.

"Ginger!"

The dog refused to move.

Man or beast. One is master. The two had never come to a showdown before—a test where sheer strength was all that mattered. Kelly cuffed the dog, knowing what it would mean, and then he was braced for the charge as Ginger leaped at him like a wolf.

But man can think; dogs cannot—always. Kelly's fists were wide apart when Ginger sprang, and the dog didn't know which fist would strike. A heavy blow. Ginger floundered back. He leaped again. The other wide-spread fist knocked him rolling. Kelly felt warm blood seeping along his arm after Ginger made the next lunge. The man kept on fighting, and suddenly the dog knew who was master. Kelly pointed up the stake trail. Ginger went that way. He still held his wounded forepaw from the ground. Ginger went, but not with tail between legs. There is no loss of dignity being bested in a square fight.

But the tawny malemute kept acting

strangely, kept restlessly roving in his position of loose leader.

An hour later he charged furiously into the blizzard, came back whining, rushed into the storm, came back. Kelly stopped the sledge, went to investigate.

He found a figure drifted over with blowing snow. The prone figure of a man—Dal Denegree.

Kelly straightened the man out, made a quick examination. Denegree hadn't been lying there a great while in the snow or his nose would have been frozen. Kelly lugged him to the sledge, pulled the sleeping bag up around him, tucked the tarp over that, then wet the unconscious man's lips with a flask of brandy he was toting.

Denegree's pale eyes blinked open. "Oh, it's you, Joe," he said in a small voice. Then as Kelly started along the staked trail, Denegree cried shrilly: "No, Joe! No; not this way! The stakes was changed to throw you off the trail! The real trail goes left instead of right back at that lantern-stake!"

Kelly swung the team, returned to the lantern and went to the left. Ginger had tried to go that way, had tried to the point of mutiny. Now the great dog, knowing he was vindicated, raced proudly along the course.

"Go it, Ginger!"

"Let me off at Solomon," Dal Denegree muttered from the sledge. "Then go on and win the race, Joe Kelly."

"You know I won't let you off at Solomon!" Kelly snarled. "Somebody has put a slug through you, and you've got to get to a doctor. That means to Nome."

"You figure it was me changed the stakes on that trail, don't you, Joe?" Denegree asked.

KELLY'S silence suggested the affirmative.

"And still you'd take me to a doctor, huh?" Denegree continued. "Well, that makes me wrong, Joe. Me, I figured you

for a butter-hearted playboy, sponging off the work of old Tin Can Ed on account of how you couldn't refuse because your dad was old Mike Kelly. But I guess I had you wrong Joe. You're doin' a great race to save that mine. You've got what it takes . . . Joe, it was Cinch Gavin changed them stakes. Me, I stuck my long nose in at the wrong time, just when Cinch was switching teams and drivers. So I got tied up, an' I was in the plane which flew Cinch to Candle to check in there. Then he come back an' changed the trail stakes. About that time I got loose. I took a bullet through me. But you won't have to worry no more about Cinch Gavin. He'll never finish this race or any other."

And then Kelly began swearing, with the blizzard whipping blood-chilling curses from his lips.

"But if Cinch Gavin is dead, then we can't collect that bet!"

"Yes, you can, Joe," said the wounded man from the sledge. "Cinch Gavin was in secret pardners with another man. And a man is liable for the debts of his pardner. Anyhow, Cinch was only the front. The other guy was the power. He—"

"Who?" Kelly asked, and then he didn't listen for the answer, because a bullet had whipped at him from the black trees beside the trail.

KELLY took a fall to the snow. The trail here was down a steep pitch, with a thick growth of scrubby spruce on either side. It was just cracking dawn, and the snow-haze of the blizzard was faintly violet color. Kelly rolled down the hill through the soft snow until he brought up against a little spruce. During the fall he'd shaken his right mitten and got the hand on the butt of the revolver he had taken from Cinch Gavin's ringer. The dogs had kept on.

"Got him!" yelled somebody from the spruce thicket up the hill. A man ap-

peared in the purple snow-haze, another, then a third.

"Take another shot, to make sure."

The speaker's parka hood was blown a bit from his face by the wind. The face was square and heavy, and a dead cigar was clamped in the mouth.

Saul Funk—mining man and promoter, who in the back room of the Ten Mile had pretended to be Tin Can Ed's friend! When it was too late, things clicked in Kelly's mind. Saul Funk was the secret partner of Cinch Gavin. Tin Can Ed had borrowed money from Funk to relocate the lost vein of the Cross Eyed Dog, then had bet the mine against Cinch Gavin's fifty thousand. The two of them, Gavin and Funk, had had old Ed where they wanted him—if they won the Sweepstakes. The switched team of Missouri hound dogs, the falsely staked trail, and now the ambush—these showed that Funk intended to win.

One of Funk's gunmen raised his rifle, sighted at Kelly lying against the little spruce on the hillside.

"I wouldn't, Funk," Kelly advised.

"Hold it," Funk snapped to the rifleman. Then: "Why not?"

Kelly got to a sitting position. "Because you can't win. Your partner is dead."

"I know about Cinch," red-faced Funk advised, shifting his soggy cigar to the other side of his square jaw. "But all that bet said was that you would win, not that Cinch would have to. Anyhow, I've got an ace in the hole. Drag Ingraham is my man. From last reports he wasn't far behind. And I want the ten thousand prize for the winner. . . . Shoot, Bill."

Both the men with Funk threw rifles to shoulders. Kelly didn't have a chance, but he dragged his revolver from under his parka. Then a shot blasted from the spruce and the man named Bill cringed. The other rifleman whipped a shot into the trees, then went down as Kelly opened up with the revolver. Saul Funk charged for shel-

ter. Kelly sent three shots after him, blindly, then got up, went cautiously up the trail. The two riflemen had stopped bullets in vital organs. They were done. Kelly went into the spruce in the direction of that shot that had saved him by distracting the riflemen and killing Bill.

He found Dal Denegree lying there on his face. Denegree had rolled off the sledge as the dogs continued, after the first shot. A trail in the snow showed where he had dragged himself up through the scrubby growth. But Denegree had taken another slug, and he knew he was dying.

"Dal, if there's anything I can do—"

Denegree's pale eyes closed, opened. "One thing—Joe," he gasped with difficulty. "Me—I never—never intended tryin' to win the race. I entered—because I suspected Cinch and Saul Funk would try to stop you. Done all I could, Joe. Now—go on and win. Me, I wasn't never—good enough—for Anita. But you—Joe, go on an' win—"

Denegree's voice ended with the chilling rattle of death.

KELLY fought on. He figured the storm would ease during the day, but it got worse. The wind howled to tornado proportions, increasing as Kelly's reserve seeped away. When Kelly hit the sea ice out of Solomon, he had nothing but his nerve. The wind had cleaned the surface to a glaze. With crampons on his boots, Kelly hung to the sledge handles, trying to keep the outfit from blowing out across the frozen sea. He didn't know how close behind the others were. The race is decided by elapsed time. The others had started at fifteen-minute intervals. Somebody could come in a couple of hours behind Kelly, some late starter, and take first prize money.

A Satanic burst of wind ripped Kelly off his feet. He tried to get his sharp crampons into the ice, but he was rolled over and over on the glazed surface. He got a con-

fused glimpse of the dogs in a fighting ball, tangled with harness and sledge, the whole lot being blown over the slick ice.

Finally Kelly stopped his motion with the sharp ice creepers on his boots, got up rubbing bruises.

But somewhere in the blizzard, somewhere beyond the white curtain of driven snow his dog team was being blown pell-mell. Where? Kelly ran, slipping, falling. He screamed into the wind.

And finally, hours later, he gave up. Ironically, the wind died, and snow sifted straight down from the white ceiling. With his little pocket compass Kelly bore north towards the shore. Reaching it, he plodded along. He'd lost out. Lost everything. To win the Sweepstakes, you have to bring your dogs in.

An hour, another, two more, Kelly trudged along. Then a whine. Kelly blinked through the falling snow. Eyes bad. Hallucinations common in the inhuman fatigue of the long race. Men have seen all sorts of strange shapes; men have finished the Sweepstakes run raving mad.

But—no! A sledge. His! The sledge on its side—but the dogs straightened out in harness, Ginger proud and erect. How—?

Kelly was on the edge of exhaustion. He had no reserve left. Tears came as he kneeled by the tawny leader of the team. What a leader! Single-handed, Ginger had straightened out that team when the wind died, had brought them back, waited at the point where a stake marked the trail! There was the last test of a dog leader. A half dozen dogs in the history of the North have been able to do that. Ginger belonged to those immortals of dog-dom.

Kelly mushed on through the falling snow. Hope put something into his frame, some acid of strength that seemed to come from outside the sand-filled muscles.

A chance! A chance to win!

Soon he had to clump ahead of the team, beating the trail with snowshoes. He

hitched Ginger again to the line, and with a rope over his shoulder helped pull the wallowing dogs.

And then Kelly ran into another dog trail, freshly made, and it seemed the end. Somebody ahead of him. And Kelly had been first to start.

Screaming curses, Kelly kept on. Might be a chance for second money. The mine was lost. He couldn't go back to Seattle broke and marry Esther. But second money would give him a grubstake. He was young. . . .

CANNON boom at Fort Davis when he passed. More weary miles. Kelly lurched on, screaming curses to keep himself and the dogs awake.

Then everybody was yelling. People screaming as he reeled down the street. Up he went, dizzily, atop shoulders. Fools! What sort of demonstration for the one who'd come first, if they went mad at him arriving second?

Drink. Turkish bath. Food. Coffee. Lots of coffee. Then, aeons later, quiet and peace inside the cabin with old Tin Can Ed and his daughter, Anita. Plump Tubby was also there, with his grease-stained canvas parka.

"Poor Dal," Anita was saying gently. "He loved me—so hopelessly."

A man rushed in. "You've won, Kelly! We've got all reports from along the trail, and nobody can possibly beat your time! You've won! They're bringing the prize money, now!"

From down the street came the yelling of many voices as they charged to crown the winner.

"But—some other team—" stammered Kelly. "It—come in ahead—"

"Me," grinned plump-faced Tubby. "I took a turn out and back to make trail, when reports come that you'd passed Solomon."

Kelly couldn't absorb it for awhile. He'd won . . . won. . . .

"And Saul Funk will pay that fifty thousand bet, to boot!" exploded Tin Can Ed happily. "Sure, I knowed Funk's play from the first. He figured on loaning me money, then foreclosing on the mine. But that was slow, so he had Cinch get me to put the Cross Eyed Dog up on the bet. Funk can't wiggle out of it. Cinch Gavin didn't trust him. They wrote out partnership papers, and Cinch put his copy for safe keeping in the bank vault."

Then more yelling, more fuss, when men arrived with first prize money. After it was over, Kelly was too keyed up to sleep. He sat and talked with Anita and old Tin Can Ed in the cabin. Just talked and talked.

"An' whut'll you do, now?" Ed asked, squinting. "Go back an' marry this girl? Esther?"

Joe Kelly looked at Anita Cann. He didn't know what to say. Everything was so different up here. Night clubs, chasing

around, keeping up a frantic pace to avoid boredom—it all seemed shallow, somehow, up here.

"I'll stay—a spell, anyhow," Kelly said.

Ed handed him a crumpled telegram. "Then this won't hurt you too much, Joe. Mike was right about that girl. That's why he wanted you to be on your own and not get married for a year."

The wire was from Esther:

HEARD ABOUT YOUR SITUATION.
AM MARRYING TOM MACKAY.

I KNOW YOU WILL UNDER-
STAND. LOTS OF LOVE.

"It come Monday, when she figured you'd lost your shirt," Ed said gently.

Kelly nodded. He looked at Anita Cann, apple-cheeked, blonde, virile. And there was something in her eyes.

"Yes," said Joe Kelly. "I guess Dad was right, after all."

He crumpled the telegram and put it in the stove.

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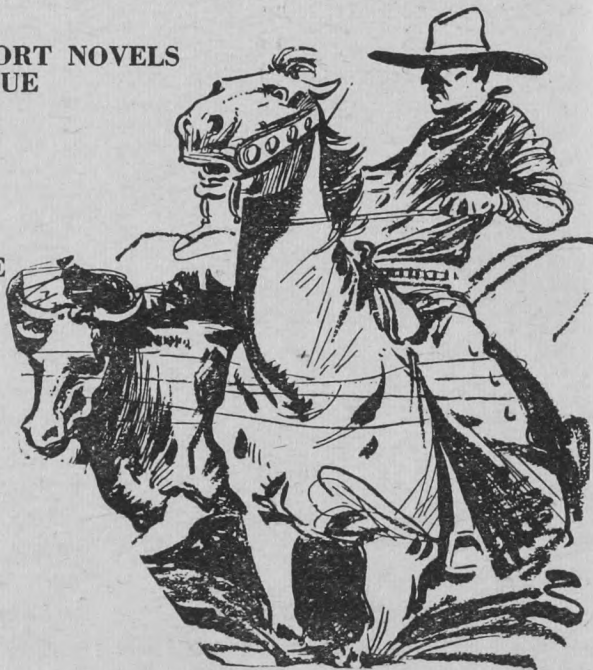
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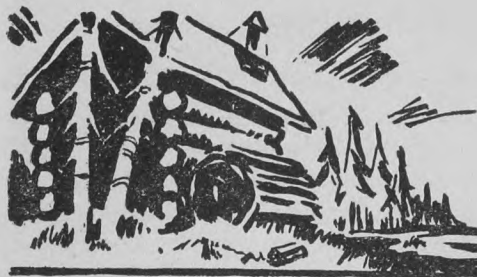
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GRIZZLY KILLER

by GUY ARNOLD

A red man's dog proves he has a white man's spirit.

YANK NEWTON was in a boastful and reckless mood when that night he bade farewell to the lounging half-breeds at Cedar Post, and proceeded, somewhat unsteadily, to the landing-stage, where his birch bark canoe was piled high with equipment. On one of the packs Tucko, his dog, lay curled up, and as Newton stepped in, sending the boat ricocheting across the dark waters, the animal looked up, her rounded scalp and huge pointed ears in wolfish silhouette.

On either side gloomy cedars overhung the waterway, but though there was as yet no moon, Newton could evidently see well enough, for with rapid, silent strokes he piloted his canoe through the multitude of protruding snags, and ere an hour was past he had gained the roaring Rapids, where a giant pine marked the stepping-off place of the first portage.

No sane woodsman would ever have attempted to shoot that rapid at night time—indeed, there were few who thought it worth the risk in broad daylight—but tonight Newton was supreme in his own confidence.

So, despite the fact that he had scarcely an inch of freeboard, they took the downward plunge, and Tucko sat up with nervous inquiry as the first cloud of spray drenched them through. Her eyes sought her master's keen, expressionless face, and she lay down again, confident in his wisdom and judgment.

But before many seconds had elapsed Newton realized that distance and speed

were deceptive in the darkness, while the white foam pathways played strange tricks with one's judgment. There was no landing now; it was a case of going on to the end.

One sea after another they shipped, while overhead the bright stars whirled, the Indian stooping forward, staring fixedly, the sinews of his naked, scraggy arms standing out like the fibers of a jack-pine. Water dripped from his face and from his long, black hair, but before the first swift run was passed the canoe swung round, gripped by an irresistible force, and the man stooped lower still as he hauled on the paddle, putting forth his utmost strength to right their water-logged craft.

Snap! It was the worst thing that could have happened under the circumstances, for the paddle broke in his grasp just above the blade. With an oath he flung aside the useless shaft, and turning began frenziedly to grope under the packs for his spare paddle. He gripped it, but it jammed, and the game was up. The canoe took a downward plunge, still broadside, and there was a report like a pistol-shot as her keel smote the surface. Then over she went, man, packs, and dog, over and over half a dozen times, glimmering grotesquely, finally to settle bottom upward, weighed down by the sodden dunnage jammed beneath the thwarts. A second or two later she struck with a grinding crash, and went to bits.

Thus Newton the Chippewan passed out of human record. No special inquiries were

made, for Newton had no debts. So far as the world of the north was concerned, he simply failed to return from his hunting-grounds, and the north went on grinding out her dramas without him.

But that day another drama opened. Daybreak found a little yellow dog sitting and shivering at the water's edge near the tail of the rapids. A slim little muckle-breed he was, part whippet, part terrier, though his big erect ears showed, wolfish ancestry, harking back from the veins of the northern malemute. He was whimpering distressfully, watching the water, nostrils quivering, as if he expected something to rise ghost-like from the whirling flood, then he moved to another point, and so on for many hours. He did not know that his master was dead—he merely knew that he had missed him, and so at length he set off down the creek, heading toward those dim northern hunting-grounds from which Newton had wrung his living.

Had Tucko been a white man's dog, he would have returned to the settlement when other hopes died, but being an Indian dog, the sullen independence of his training bade otherwise. He had known but one master, and there was nothing in his limited dealings with the rest of the world to create a sense other than aloof distrust. So, in his innermost desires, first and foremost lingered the wish to find Newton, or failing in this, he would go on somewhere—somehow, without him.

Tucko was little more than a puppy, and his character was yet in the mold. Accustomed, like all Indian dogs, to fending for himself, he did not want for food, for he knew how to surprize the wary red squirrels which swarmed in thousands everywhere, and he was a past master in the art of ambushing Wahboos, the wood-hare. He knew the scream of the lynx, and the hollow bay of the timber wolf, so Tucko lived when grievous misfortune would have befallen one less able than himself.

ON THE third day of his searching he saw a great eagle swooping and circling over something which lay, freshly stranded, on a sand-bank, but he merely steered clear of the thing and the place, for eagles are not to be trusted; but even had he seen all that there was to see, he would not have understood.

Tucko was heading for the musquash flats of the prairie foothills—where surely he would find his master—and between the mountain forests and the plains there lies a vast belt of country which, at certain seasons, is brimming with winged game, at other seasons, lifeless as a desert. This was the gameless season, and as the birch and balsam groves slowly gave way to vast undulations of tundra and jack-pine, hunger befell Tucko.

Always he was watching for game, and time and again after an elaborate stalk, he discovered that the object of his excitement was not a ground squirrel at all, but the stump of a pine snapped off short by the gale. Once he flattened like a rag on seeing a barren lands wolf come down to drink half a mile away, and once he saw a herd of caribou, and for several days he followed them, hoping that one would die or fall out, or in some other way prove obliging.

That hope also died, and he returned to the river, very lean and lank now, but his wild instincts told him not to yield to the temptation of trying to satisfy his hunger by drinking cold water as a city-bred dog would probably have done. He loped steadily on, still looking for his master—though three weeks had elapsed since last he saw him—keeping always to the hollows, peering coyote-like over every ridge before he crossed it, and so in course of time the jack-pine country also was crossed, and ahead lay the rugged grandeur of the eastern slopes, beyond that the brimming prairies.

So it came about that Tucko, so weak now that he tottered in his steps—a piti-

able skeleton of a dog, but still searching, still hopeful—gleaned from the wind the tidings of a great feast somewhere to the northern side. Up-wind he drifted, checking, readjusting his course till there, in a hollow, lying among the sage bush, he beheld a dead steer, and standing by it—a mammoth grizzly!

Tucko was too hungry to be afraid—too near death himself to fear its final stoop. So he drifted up to seek the mercy of a king.

But here was another molded by the hands of the lean, inexorable north! The grizzly raised his head and looked at him. He was accustomed to seeing coyotes near at hand while he feasted, and usually he took no heed of them. If they became too bold he would dash out and scatter them, but he had more sense than to follow far, for he knew that the wild dogs are fleetest than the wind. Perhaps, however, he recognized Tucko for what he was, a creature of man's threshold, a foe in hand with the deadliest of all his foes. Tucko drifted up, and then with a coughing snarl the grizzly charged.

A coyote would merely have doubled and twisted, then yapped his mockery over the dust clouds, but Tucko was so weak that, startled and surprized he fell, and the grizzly, more surprized than he was, charged right over him.

Tucko struggled up and headed for the sage-brush, sneaking from bush to bush, but the grizzly knew now that he could catch him. Silently, systematically, he set to work to hunt him out, striking down the cover with his forepaws, listening silently, then drifting to another point. Again he would strike and listen, while Tucko wormed in and out, knowing now that he was in mortal peril of his life.

THAT grizzly was hunting not for food, which was abundantly at hand, but for the vicious joy of killing, so he would not readily abandon his quest. The minutes passed, and his first tactics having failed,

he worked himself into a fury, crashing headlong hither and thither, rearing up with forepaws widely flung, crashing in another direction, guided only by his nostrils. Tucko crawled and belied and crept, flattened out and panting when an opportunity occurred, but at length he sighted him.

Now it was merely a matter of time. Headlong he dashed after him, and as he sought the cover the grizzly stole silently and swiftly to the other side, so that they all but collided. The twigs and the sand flew as from a whirlwind as he struck, then followed hot at Tucko's heels, scattering the bush which hindered him but was too slender to hinder the bear. In and out, round and about, feinting, dodging, diving headlong, but each close call was closer than the last, and Tucko assuredly was doomed.

Then, in the very act of charging, the grizzly froze to a statue. For a moment he stood, deadly still, then swinging from right to left he stole away—straight and silently and true for the tundra heights.

And, as Tucko lay panting, she heard the *click-click* of a pony's hoofs, which presently ceased, then a man's voice, hushed and contemplative, as when one thinks aloud.

"—!" said the voice. "Blamed if I didn't think so! A grizzly too!"

Languidly, as if possessed of a sleeping-sickness, dragging himself along on his forepaws, trailing his hind limbs, little Tucko strove to obtain a view of him. He did not mean to go to him—oh no! He meant to creep away and hide, for, always fearful of a race he did not know, his recent experiences had not tended to make him more trusting.

Part plainsman, part mountaineer, Bill Sackton partook of the rugged splendor of both. He was looking down at his dead steer, then his keen gaze rose as without dismounting he examined the tracks. So Tucko among the twisted scrub found him-

self looking into the man's eyes, and humbled before, he cowered into the dust, awaiting his will.

"What's that blame little coyote up to? Skit!"

His hand fell to his belt, and he withdrew a heavy automatic pistol. Still the creature in the sage did not stir.

"Well I be ——!" muttered Bill Sackton, and still holding his gun he slipped from his pony and approached Tucko.

Tucko lay very still, his muzzle between his forepaws, and Bill, stooping over him, raised his head in one strong hand.

"You poor little critter!" he said aloud. "Blessed if you ain't pretty well all in!"

Then with Tucko under one arm he rode homeward, fording the river which alone could whisper the story of Newton the Chippewan.

Bill had two dogs of his own, one mostly greyhound, the other chiefly bull-terrier, sturdy, hard-fighting beasts, kept for trailing dangerous game, and therefore schooled in a rough school. He lived alone in a small cabin, with a corral adjoining. He kept a few cattle, a few sheep, and several horses, and eked out a living by prospecting and hunting. Ranching was his hobby.

Thus opened up the third phase of Tucko's life, and so strange to him it at first seemed that he would not eat the food Bill offered, so he fed him by hand, and the satisfying of his bodily cravings came to him with the mental associations of the man's kind hand, an impression which left upon his mind an indelible mark.

But Bill did not want the dog. He was of no earthly use to him, and as the days passed, and he regained his strength, it became very evident that his sufferings had completely broken his spirit. Bill often wondered what he had suffered, and when at night time he lay at Bill's feet, looking up into his eyes, he was prompted to caress him by the same sense of sympathy that had led him to take the dog in. But Bill was no coward himself, and he hated it in

other things, so when Tucko fled in terror when the stove smoked, when he cowered in abject fear before Blackie and Dancer, who were above heeding him, Bill usually drove Tucko angrily from his sight. He did not know just what his caresses meant to this little waif of the hills, nor what weight his curses carried.

One day a mountaineer rode by, and stopped to pass the time of day with Bill.

"How much for the purp?" he inquired.

"You can have him for an old pair of socks," Bill replied. "Did you ever see such a scarecrow?"

They both looked at Tucko and laughed.

"Maybe he'll improve when you've fed him up," observed the visitor leaving.

All that day Tucko hid under the bungalow, for he knew that they had laughed at him and said unkind things!

But one thing Bill had to admit—Tucko was teachable. Being an Indian dog, he was at first of the opinion that anything he could take and hold was rightly his. To call him a thief would be unfair, for he simply did not understand, and one day Bill lost his dinner. Naturally he punished the dog, but he never had to punish him a second time for that.

Yet, having no use for the dog, and despising him not a little, it was only natural that Tucko drifted into a backwash. He ceased to look for his master's caresses, dear as they were to him. He loved him none the less, for he had won the dog's heart in the hour of his direst need, but by degrees he imbibed the knowledge that his place in the household was a lowly one. So, like many a good man, who sees nothing better in store for him, he settled with sad resignation to accept his humble lot.

ON THE evening of the day that Bill took Tucko home, he had set out at sunset with two huge bear-traps on each side of his saddle. These he had carefully set by the carcass of the steer, and every day since, he had examined the sets

through his glasses from a distant ridge. A month or more had now passed, but the grizzly had not been back, yet Bill still watched intently from the windward side. And one morning, sure enough, the ground all round the steer was raked and furrowed, and one of the traps was gone.

Bill went home for his two dogs, knowing well that the grizzly, hampered as it was, would not travel many miles, but he left Tucko shut up in the cabin, remarking as he dropped the latch:

"We don't want you, miserable little croaker!"

Blackie and Dancer were unquestionably brave dogs, but on encountering the trail of that grizzly both of them said a good deal, but did not seem overanxious to run it. Their part was merely to indicate the right direction, and Bill, armed with a high velocity rifle, would do the rest; and at length, after a good deal of coaxing and urging, they took up the line. Soon they were heading over country through which no horseman could follow, and Bill, making a detour, rejoiced to learn from the way in which they threw their tongues that they were warming up to their work. Five miles farther on he intercepted them, and learned to his disgust that they were chasing a mangy little coyote!

Angrily he whipped them off, and precious hours of light were lost in refinding the trail. Again the dogs set off, heading now for the high country, which seemed more hopeful. Up and up they climbed, while Bill, listening at intervals for their baying, came eventually to the topmost barrens, but still could not find them.

Evening was near when eventually he discovered them—Blackie wallowing in a pool, Dancer rolling in the sand having completed his wallow. Bill cursed and raved and lashed at them, for the strenuous day had resulted in nothing at all, and with night so near there was nothing for it but to return to the valley.

It must have been an hour or so previ-

ous to this that a new restlessness fell upon the little yellow dog imprisoned in the cabin. He got up and began to whine, sniffing and scratching at the door, leaping to the bench and peering out of the window, his eyes bright, his ears immensely acock. His whines turned to yelps, his yelps to frenzied howls. He snapped at the legs of the bench, he hurled himself, clawing wildly at the door. At length he attacked the window, scratching at the joints, then standing back he hurled himself at the glass with the frenzy of a trapped animal. It cracked across but beat him back, bruised and dazed, yet gnashing his teeth he hurled himself again, this time to fall, cut and shaken, on the grass behind him. For a moment he ran hither and thither, undecided which way to take, then straight and true he headed for the river, and across.

The descent Bill chose, though a perilous one, was by far the quickest, and the wiry pony on which he was mounted was fully accustomed to those giddy shelves. He would have trusted her where he would hardly have trusted himself on foot, and so, as the glory of the sunset faded from orange to gold, Bill, whistling jauntily, for his anger was soon forgotten, looked out across the rolling ridges from a narrow game-track across the cliff face, a drop of close upon eight hundred feet directly beneath his right elbow. The wind was behind him, which was unfortunate, and his two dogs head to tail, followed closely at his pony's heels.

PRESENTLY they reached a point at which a deeply cut fissure ran darkly into the mountain face, and here there was a perilous elbow turn to the left, where the track was partly washed away. Bill had all but gained it when the light directly ahead was shut out by what looked like a great boulder, moving silently round the bend, and completely blocking the only way of travel.

Next moment Bill's heart leaped as it had never leaped before, for there, not forty paces away, stood the grizzly, the trap still fast to one forepaw, its little pig eyes, red with rage, fixed upon him.

For a moment Bill remained spellbound, so also his pony. He heard the whimper of his dogs as they turned and fled. Then there came an agonized scream from his cayuse, which, unable to turn on the narrow shelf, reared up, and hung there, poised in giddy suspense.

Bill had no time to disengage his rifle from the saddle-holster, but he quickly slipped his feet from the stirrups and prepared to dismount on the cliff side. He heard a *cough-cough* from the fur-clad monster ahead, and knew that it was about to charge; he heard the clanging of the steel trap, and the rumble of the log on the naked rocks. Then over the pony went, to fall with a thud, pinning him against the wall, one leg under the girth.

Through the unbelievable nightmare of it all Bill, peering up, saw the bear lumbering toward him, foam flying from its yellow fangs as it slashed at the trap and the iron chain which sorely hindered its progress. Desperately the man fought to obtain possession of his automatic, but pinned as he was he could not reach it. On the grizzly came till its way was barred by the thrashing hindlegs of the pony, and as the monster reared to strike, Bill saw that only a miracle could save him now. The gorilla-like arm flashed out, he heard the terrible, rending thud, and the next moment the pony was hurled from beneath him, to spin giddily downward into space. And there, not five feet away, nothing between them now, both huge paws upraised, one with the trap as proof of the evil about to be avenged, Bill beheld the death of which he had sometimes dreamed.

He was free now, and struggling to regain his pistol he leaped back, but—there was no time. One bullet would not stop the brute at such close range, even had

there been time to aim and fire it, but, as the very buzzards in the blue above paused in their glide, something happened.

It was as if a yellow cloth, borne by the wind, went hurtling past, to smite the grizzly's face and there to hang, flapping wildly as the monster snarled and shook.

Tucko! Little Tucko! There, his sharp fangs fast in the grizzly's snarling face, shaking and snatching as he hung, was the mongrel dog whose spirit had been broken on the long and hungry trail! The other dogs—the fighting dogs—were gone; they must almost have brushed her from the shelf as he, in the desperation of a deadly fear, came on to meet the death from which they fled; and now, between Bill Sackton and the bear, was one who knew that foe of old, and hated him.

It was merely a second's diversion, but it was the needed second. Two massive paws clutched him, and hurled him back at his master's feet. There was another coughing roar, but accompanied now by a pistol shot, followed by shot after shot like the tearing of calico. There was a heavy thud as the blue flame ceased, the clash of steel, the sound of great claws rasping naked stone, and Bill and Tucko were alone.

In the quiet that followed, Bill heard a sound from far below, and knew that his pony had reached the valley. He peered over the edge and saw a dark mass following it, spinning as it fell in a way that turned him sick. Then the man crouched back, and buried his face in his arms, groaning, till he felt a cold muzzle thrust against his cheek, and his hands groped out in the tenderest of caresses.

A FEW days later the other mountaineer returned and called at Bill's cabin with the news.

"How's the purp getting on?" he inquired, with a wave toward Tucko.

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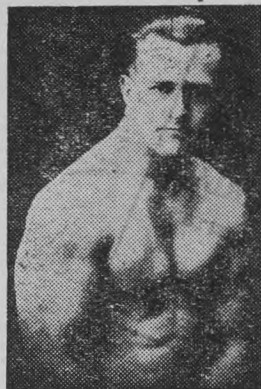
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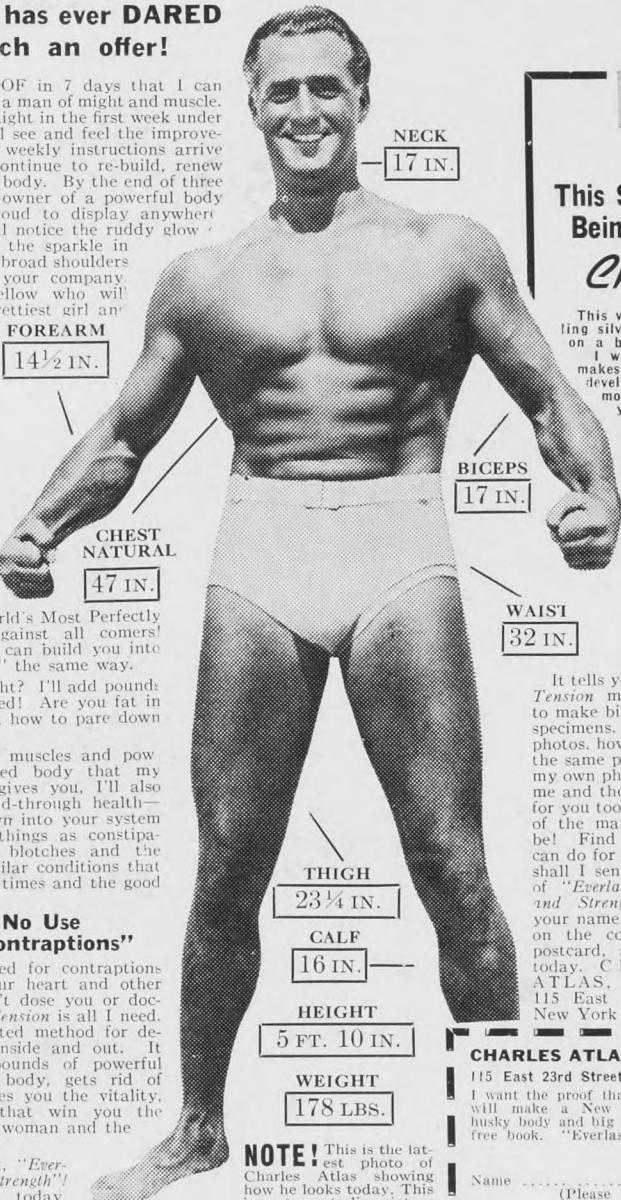
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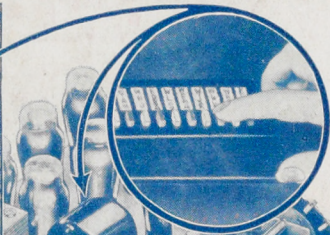
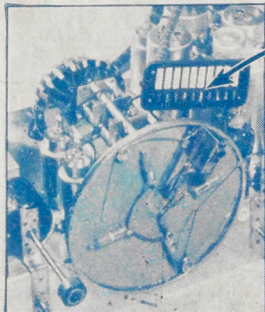
NOTE! This is the latest photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

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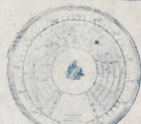
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"Mystic Brain" interprets your touch button signals and controls electric motor. Ten contact fingers can be easily set to any ten stations you desire

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